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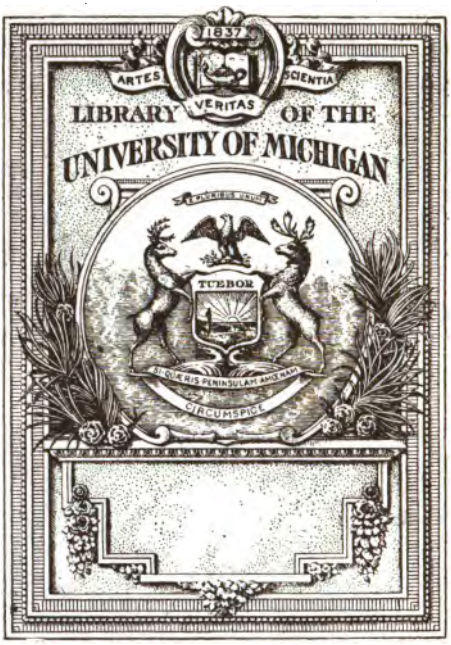
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VIVIEN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE RAGGED MESSENGER

FABULOUS FANCIES

THE COUNTESS OF MAYBURY

VIVIEN

BY

W. B. MAXWELL

FIFTH EDITION

METHUEN & CO.
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VIVIEN

I

A FEW poor mortals in a Bloomsbury lodging-house had assembled to celebrate the christening of a female child with a feast of oranges, sherry, figs, port, and dessert biscuits. Some careless or superstitious person—the Irish monthly nurse, no doubt—had left the street door ajar, to give ingress to the fairies.

And the fairies had come—in force.

Quite invisible to mortal eye, not to be heard by mortal ear, imponderous, imperceptible, but bustling, businesslike as a mortal board of directors, club committee, or urban council, in a hurry to get their work through and be gone through the yellow fog to the other end of the town, the good fairies and the bad fairies ranged themselves to east and west of the shabby room for the task which from endless repetition had fallen into a mere form, a matter of routine, a wearisome incident of the fairy day's work.

'As is usual,' the fairy chairman was saying, 'we will take the minutes of our last meeting as read—and passed. Thank you. If certain fairies near the door would have the kindness to cease chattering. Now then, as to this boy—girl? Thank you. As to this girl.'

'Name—Vivien Shelton,' said the secretary, reading slowly from one of a bundle of papers.

'Only child. Father—Colonel Shelton—man of but moderately good family, yet with that unreasoning pride of race which—'

'Get on—get on,' cried a bad and irritable fairy.

'Mother. As illustrative of the sorry manner in which these poor worms keep the records to which they attach so much imp—'

'Get on!'

'Mother—and this is what may appear not uninteresting to fairies if they will permit me to continue—' and the secretary

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beamed a mild defiance to the west of the chair, on which side the evil-intentioned among the audience had all placed themselves.

'Mother—curiously enough—is, by descent, from noble stock—quite unknown to her. I have a note here to the effect—Royal blood. One of the English Henries—Henry I., II., III. Tut, tut! The number has escaped me. But I have it here, if fairies will bear with me a moment,' and the secretary began to fumble with his papers.

But fairies would not bear with him—not even the kindly-disposed.

'Get on—get on. To work. Shut up. Record the gifts and let us go,' they cried.

'I give her vanity,' shouted a bad fairy.

'I have pleasure in counteracting that by giving her—er—er—love of approbation,' said a good fairy—a modest, retiring fairy, shyly rising to register the gift and sitting down with a blush.

'I give her foolish self-confidence.'

'And I, proper self-respect.'

'Credulity.'

'Trustfulness.'

'I give her irregularity of feature.'

'I give her fascination.'

And so on. It was merely formal. Vote and counter vote. The good and bad fairies might, and often did, pair and save themselves trouble by staying away. As a rule the majority either way was too small really to work with. The good and bad elements just balanced each other, turning out, year after year, a colourless mediocre amalgam—the usual bundle of contradictions which compose the uninteresting average mortal. Just at the end of a meeting the good or bad fairies might now and then put in some solid unchallenged votes, unexpectedly getting the upper hand through the laziness of voters; but in general nothing happened, and the thing was, to many minds, becoming a fairy farce. Only by trick or plot could either side over-reach the other—by drugging the foolish old secretary—long past his work—burning his notice papers, suppressing a batch of summonses. When this happened there was fun, and a saint or an assassin was the result.

'I give her vague imaginings and morbid fancies,' grunted a fairy bubbling over with malevolence.

'And I give her a sense of humour,' said a smiling fairy, with an ironical bow—a queer, quaint, mock reverence that made the last voter almost choke with rage.

Then the fairies hurried away, through the fog which hid the

twilight and the dusk which pretended to be night, to a grim old house in Dover Street, where a little infant lord had on this short January day been handsomely christened with a fine string of ten or a dozen names of great princes and lesser potentates. It was known that there would be a big meeting, heavy voting, and possibly some surprises.

'And now,' said the mortal father, 'I drink to the health, long life, and prosperity of Miss Vivien,' and he raised his glass and bowed to the cradle.

'And may the first thing she breaks—I believe babies begin to break things at a very early age—be the chain of Devil's luck that has all his life tied down her poor old father.'

He was the only man present and the ladies laughed heartily, as though he had said something very amusing. And, indeed, when he lifted his glass, it had been in his mind to make a facetious little speech, to string a few mirth-provoking periods, a mimic display of public oratory to gratify and tickle the restricted intelligence of his wife's somewhat humble guests—fellow-wayfarers on life's highroad, stepping in pace for a minute out of sympathy while you condemn the severity of the gradient, rather than travelling companions or friends of the family. But on uttering the first words, he became shaken with the strange recurrent fever to which day by day at this very hour he was a prey: an acceleration of the pulse, a fiery fidgeting in the blood, an irritable activity in the nerve cells—an overpowering sense of physical discomfort, an enervating, almost nauseating, nostalgia—sensations which had once alarmed him, but which he now knew from experience to mean nothing more than the necessity of going to his club.

As he passed up the broad staircase towards the regions of diurnal delight and repetitive rapture on the noble first floor, two old fogeys paused and moralised as grey-beards will, when their well-matured thoughts are, like the steps of the ascent, many though shallow.

'Now, to show how little we really know of those we think we know, there's that fellow Shelton. Known him—here—for years—but on my word, if challenged, I couldn't tell you who he is, or *what* he is, where he lives or *how* he lives.'

'A bit of a struggle.'

'Find it a struggle, eh? Then don't hurry.'

'I wasn't speaking of the stairs, but Shelton. I don't know, mind you, but I believe he is a very fine fellow—is Shelton—

—hides a great deal of misery beneath a pleasant manner and a good-natured word.'

'God bless my soul. A very noble fellow if he does.'

'Between you and I, I believe his domestic life has been one long martyrdom. I forget who told me. I think it was a man in the smoking-room one Sunday evening—fellow who doesn't often come here. *You* would know him. It was either a selfish extravagant wife—sort of woman whose neck I'd like to wring: or else it was a brood of children—ne'er-do-wells eating him up. I forget which. Between you and I and the post, I never much cared about Shelton till I heard it, but I was so touched I've been deuced civil to him ever since—on that account.'

It was a really good club—some say it is the best—one of the old frowning-faced clubs in which men address the servants by name, and nearly all say 'between you and I': not one of the new mozaic-featured terra-cotta palaces whose thousands of members tip the waiters, and talk faultless grammar with a cockney accent.

II

HER father named her.

It was perhaps characteristic of Colonel Shelton that he should cynically choose from that fair book the only woman's name of vile association. Her mother was not literary—Guinevere, Enid, etc. 'You must decide, dear.' She might, in truth, have preferred Guinevere, because Guinny would, to her gentle mind, have been a pleasant contraction. After years of makeshift and contrivance, she instinctively sought and rejoiced in the secondary use, the subordinate rather than the obvious virtue of everything presented to her consideration—the cloth that will turn best, the sofa that makes a couch, the chest of drawers that changes at will to a washing-stand. Inanimate objects were never really friends until they had suffered the metamorphosis of temporary convenience. The flowers taken from a re-trimmed bonnet had never bloomed for her as when transplanted to the borders of a new straw hat; the heavy winter jacket, which had always seemed an oppressive stranger, with the lining extirpated, the fur removed, and the full tails cut down to the bone, became a light and high-spirited companion when worn under summer suns. She accepted the name of Vivien for her tardily produced child with a tender unquestioning smile; and then did her best to knock the surface sense out of it by calling her daughter 'Vi.'

Meek, enduring, gentle creature, keeping a smile on pale lips and passing from makeshift to makeshift: through kindly ruse and innocent trickery, getting nearer and nearer to the last and most surprising, wonderful, and complete contrivance of all—the bed that turns into a coffin.

Vivien's earliest recollections were blurred by London fog. A curious, many-toned mist hung over her first experiences, lifting for a little every now and then to show clear and fresh something wonderful and full of delight—like the glimpse of sunlit valley, bare rocks, white water, and the green of sloping meadows seen by climbers from cloud-wrapt hills. And it is so extraordinarily difficult for a little girl greedy of knowledge,

keenly alive to the necessity of storing up all information likely to be of future service, to draw a firm line between the strange and inspiriting occurrences of waking hours and the completely enthralling adventures of dreams.

'Mamma, look. Oh do look. I told you I could fly, and if this isn't flying, please say what it is.'

Poised on toes, from the top of the steep staircase we have swooped down into the dark hall, have soared up again to the landing and are now, with perfect ease and a sense of exhilaration from a new form of exercise, floating round and round beneath the discoloured ceiling of our sitting-room.

But that was a dream. Alas, little girls are inferior to the busy sparrows in this. They do not fly. A sad and sober truth to be accepted with regret. The collective wisdom of that calm, slow-moving race—grown-ups—is adverse to our conviction, and not to be shaken on the point though one eagerly explains that we have done it not once but again and again.

Grown-ups fill one with a pleasant sense of veneration, but they are not always easy to understand; and one is tempted sometimes to doubt if they really know everything. For instance, among them, a great deal too much fuss is made about the black deposit that is to be found on all objects—the window frames, banisters, white-stockinged knees, and open palms. It is quite harmless, and when passed from black hands across one's warm face is indeed refreshing.

Our house and those about it, which are exactly similar, one would suppose to form the most splendid range of buildings in this world of London—admirable and altogether satisfactory arrangement of the universe, for which unstinted praise is due to the grown-ups—if one had never looked upon the wide wonder of the neighbouring squares. Our street is silent and empty as a rule, but by boldly attacking the undiscovered country at one end of it, one comes into the unceasing tumult of traffic—a crash and roar, an appalling moving barrier to take one's breath away. At the other end of the street lie the magnificent squares and broad joining roads, in which fierce, growling-voiced men are now busy with pick and hammer clearing away gates and bars and chains and posts.

Interesting and unlooked-for discovery, tumbled upon in pursuit of a line of vague research, experiments followed without settled plan, but generally tending towards a just knowledge of primary truths and main principles: By lying with your head on the mat in the draught from under the hall door you can plainly detect the buzz and crackle of the traffic, although you are

entirely unconscious of it when standing upright. Quite distinct and growing louder while you listen, filling one's ear with the dull grating of wheels, the clear, metallic tappings of countless horses' feet. Rumbling and beating in one's ear, even when removed from one's convenient post of observation, until, as time wears on towards the hour of bed, one's whole head is dolorously full of the phenomenon as it wickedly changes from a pleasant lulling murmur to a tearing intolerable anguish.

'Earache,' explain the all-knowing. Our first acquaintance with a full-fledged, strong of wing ache, although we have had baby grumblings of pain ere this. Earache! One cannot question the decision. A long-continued torment, for which the cure is erroneously supposed to be cotton-wool steeped in hot oil; whereas it is really time, and nothing else.

Earache is very bad: but is it worse than the dream of trouble, which now comes back again and again, changing in form but rigidly persistent in aim and intention—to distress? Slowly we become aware of a task to perform, an inchoate, indescribable matter of business to carry through, which is essentially, one might suppose obviously, far beyond the scope and powers of a small little girl successfully to tackle. We who know nothing of figures, except one or two of the humblest and most insignificant among numbers, are called upon to rearrange, count, adjust, sift out, pile up gigantic groups of figures—more than the world can contain, tumbling and slipping and changing from moment to moment on a floor absurdly bigger than the surface of the whole earth—and then store and stock them in dull grey sacks in some unknown order of which we are required to guess the key. Indistinct, unintelligible, altering in character as one regards it: such is the crushing dream-labour to which we are introduced, and which we feebly undertake, making no progress, realising that in the nature of things appreciable progress is impossible. Who has set so monstrous a task? The unknown, incalculable powers that rule the universe. And why have they set it? Because the whole fabric of life, the security of immeasurable spaces which stretch beyond the believable all round our troubled cot, are intimately bound up with its prompt and unerring accomplishment.

Certainly when one wakes in the dark, to sob and gasp from the crushing sense of the unachievable, then shakes it off and goes to sleep only to be immediately set to work again, this dream of trouble is very bad indeed.

Distressingly plain as it is in its more salient features, there seem to be no means by which grown-ups can be made to comprehend the dream of trouble. They confound it with this

other new and excessive discomfort, this midnight attack, a hot and cold upheaving of all one's innermost self, which is, it is stated, the danger that always lurks beneath the beautiful golden envelope of oranges.

Even that most sympathetic and complaisant of companions among the grown-up race—the broad-aproned, dark-gowned dweller in the basement—unquestioned lord of the iron house and the red fire within, great chief of the half-lit world of glittering pots and pans, repellent wooden pails and seductive rolling-pins and paste-boards—even she confesses that most carefully chosen words have failed to convey to her the vaguest comprehension of what we have been discussing.

'Not stomach-ache, nor headache, nor earache, nor tooth-ache! Then I'm sure I don't know what it *can* be. Now, out of the way, my dear. I'm going to pop this in the oven.'

'Oh, let me open the door.'

'You'll burn your little fingers if you don't mind. Here, take this cloth and wrap it round the handle.'

Then the door of the well-planned iron house is slowly pulled open—it is a heavy door requiring all one's strength to move—and the white effigy of a pie is placed upon the first floor of the warm building, and carefully shut up to undergo the slow and mysterious process which shall turn it into the true and perfect tart for the sumptuous late dinner of the other lodgers.

Truly a charming companion, our cook: so robust and self-reliant in the practice of her glorious art, and yet not so proud and overbearing as to reject assistance when intelligently offered. It is to her that we at last turn for relief, the comfort of certainty whether good or bad, in a matter of doubt which of late has come to weigh heavily on our mind. How old is papa?

'Why getting on. Your pa must be well past fifty I should say.'

Oh dear! The cold comfort of certainty. It is worse, infinitely worse than we had anticipated. We had known that he was old, immensely old. We had feared that he must be much past twenty—the age at which the title of grown-up is assumed—but *fifty*—probably the oldest papa in London—Terrible!

'And is mamma as old as papa?' we falter.

'Lor' no. Nothing near so old. Your ma's what one may call almost a young lady. And a very nice lady too. I've no word to say against your ma.'

Oh how pleasant to hear this—to know that the tremendous gulf, made by the rolling, and to us uncountable years, which vaguely stretches between papa and us, does not divide us from mamma. In the impulse created by the good words of cook

we take her hand, as much of the finger end of it as we can control, and say with strong feeling:

'I do like you.'

'And I like you, my dear,' she says kindly.

But we do not continue to like her long. There comes between us something to wipe out the past, sweep away all memory of mutual sympathy, of information freely imparted, of aid readily volunteered. It is a mouse.

Surely the ingenuity of grown-up man never schemed and perfected anything better and finer than this little mansion of the mouse. With its clean white wood, tin clamps, slender bars, tiny nail-heads, and extraordinary but most imposing front door, it is a marvellous example of the smallest, and consequently the most excellent, form of house-building. And to think that cook should buy so delightful a toy out of her own money: for herself, to play with!

'Now we must toast some cheese and put it on the 'ook. Yes. The thing 'anging down from the roof.'

'Are you sure he likes cheese?'

The odour of the hissing fragment is overpowering.

'He just loves it. Can't be too strong for him. I daresay he smells it and is licking his chops already.'

The hot odorous dinner is adjusted on the hanging table; with hospitable front door thrown wide, the dear little house awaits its honoured guest, out of harm's way and 'meddlesome paws'—whatever that may mean—in a corner of the room; and we are told to wait in patience. How long? A minute? More! Hours? Oh! Perhaps all day! And the next day! Oh dear!

Oh! Breath drawn deep in rapture: the mouse is in his house. Summoned long before we dared hope for the good news, we are lying on the floor face to face with this new strange thing of joy. He surpasses our wildest imaginings: a toy such as the cunning hand of man, the unbridled fancy of childhood has never fashioned—a thing alive. Alive, quite as alive, possibly more alive than we are. A grown-up amongst his miniature race: turning about his narrow room with agile spring, showing tiny paws between his bars and twirling a slender tail, sitting up even—looking at us with his pretty head on one side—bright beads of eyes—fluffy, furry, with whiskers, most adorable living toy.

'But, see. See. He hasn't *touched* his cheese!'

Slowly and warily, with a contented smile on her broad red face, the huge woman manipulates the strange mechanism of the door; takes him out, by the tail; carries him head downwards across the kitchen into the pantry, anxiously followed

by Vivien; and lets him fall, making a little splash, into one c the evil-looking tubs which stands half full of water in the lea lined sink.

Why? Vivien's heart has almost stopped beating in excess c troubled wonder. Leaning her chin on the wall of the sink, sh watches intently. Slowly, methodically, the little creature swimming round and round the tub. His moving shadow i thrown upon the white wood beneath the water; his long ta stretches out below the surface. He is altered in colour an size. He is quite black now, and much smaller: only his fac delicate whiskers, and bright beads of eyes, are above the surfac of the water.

'Now. Take him out. Let him run.'

The gigantic woman still smiles while she answers: conveyin —not in the words which one can hardly hear for the thump c one's heart-beats—the unbearable idea of pitiless, inexorabl doom. Never, in this world of men and mice, to run again.

In a frenzy of horror and fear Vivien attempts a rescue madly struggles in the great arms; and is carried away kickin screaming, howling.

From the moment in which she entered the half-lit pantry, has been as though that dream of trouble had taken bodil shape — a gigantic, crushing, destroying presence, perceive without being seen, suddenly rising up and towering above he towering above her until it blots out the very sunlight by it chilling, shrouding immensity.

This tragedy of the basement marked the introduction c something new into Vivien's life—the element of fear. Un reasoning, thought-stopping, bone-shaking terror, waking her i convulsions at night, to grown-ups clustered round her bed— distinguished gathering including even papa—inquiring, cor soling, almost deferential, paying a little girl a kind of thoughtfu respect not noticed in this dark hour of tempestuous panic, bu which is, one must confess, gratifying when one comes soberl to consider it in the calm of a sunny morning.

Gradually the day seemed to conquer the night in Vi's youn life; the thronged world of her dreams retired within th boundaries of sleep, baffled and driven back: no longer venturin to invade the solid ground of waking hours, allowing her to co centrate her increasing powers on the pursuit of knowledg undisturbed.

No more flying, but such a mass of information, borne o the murmuring gale of mamma's soft voice, as to fill all empt spaces in which foolish fancies used to breed.

Prayers. The dearness of lodgings; the security of four-wheelers, the perils of a hansom; the comfort and support of policemen in crossing main thoroughfares; and the beneficent God, to whose ear the evening and morning petitions are addressed, who governs even policemen, and guards good little girls from being run over though these may fail, who also watches over sparrows which need his care though apparently so well able to look after themselves that they habitually take the most reckless risks; the names of streets: Oxford Street, Tottenham Court Road; the strange underlying laws that regulate and systematise the colour of omnibuses; the good shops and the bad shops; the necessity of going to good shops in catering for papa even though they are also dear shops; rain, thunder, and lightning; the seasons—knowledge and still more knowledge—church, pot hooks and hangers, words of one syllable and '*collex*': additional recitations got by heart to stumble through with closed eyes and laboured breath, at mamma's knee on wet Sundays.

There are two rich aunts, half-sisters of papa, Mrs. Rogers and Mrs. Burnett by name, who pay occasional visits, one at a time, and express contentment at our growth and proficiency, notwithstanding lamentable failures in repetition of the shortest of collects. One of them declares that her own little girl of seven—greatly our senior—is far less advanced.

It was a pity that papa should always have been compelled to go out in the afternoon and stay out until long after Vi's bedtime—because papa had always filled her with a sense of fascinating mystery, and unbounded admiration. Tall, thin, and black, wearing splendid dark-coloured clothes, with long, narrow feet in shining boots which never in any circumstances were to be touched by the maids' blacking brushes, and constantly imprisoning his trousers in a curious machine composed of varnished boards and brass screws, papa had been early recognised as a far grander and more terrible force than mamma: a source of dread and admiration, and, at will, of that most exquisite of phenomena, uncontrollable laughter. It was at once grand and awe-inspiring when papa occasionally, on Sundays, announced that he would dine at home.

One trembled, while one gulped one's tea and ate one's bread and butter with mamma at one end of the table, lest some accident should have befallen the cutlets and asparagus from papa's good shop. Joy or discomfort, laughter or tears, the whole evening seemed to hang on a thread, as papa lifted the dish cover, and, with puckered forehead and gloomy eyes, prodded the brown meat with his fork. Peeping over the rim

of one's cup, one was spell-bound, afraid to look, yet impotei to turn away. But if it was all right, if the danger-signal which only mamma could properly read, disappeared, if th implied orders for conversation and merriment were issued, wh a happy evening, what a companion, what an enchanter of father!

When the bones of the cutlets had been removed and th little bottle of red wine was nearly empty, he would talk: t would sing, in an unknown tongue—French—little snatches comic songs, drawing down the corners of his thin-lipped mout in affected woe, then tapping the side of his thin nose in a bur of preposterous sprightliness, waving his arms and pointing wit gestures so inexpressibly grotesque that his little daughte would roll upon her chair in paroxysms of uncontrollable mirth Then, in a moment, he would pretend that there was no occasio that he could understand for laughter. Had he said anythin odd or out of the way? Were we laughing at *him*? And if w must laugh, could not we take the trouble to learn to laugh?

Then he would screw up his pallid face into a web of wrinkles squirm and contort himself and emit the most ridiculous giggling squealing noises while he rubbed his eyes with the knuckles o his hands—in mimicry of us and our manner of laughter.

'That's the way *you* laugh, young lady. You are doing i now. Worse than ever. I never knew such a child.'

Oh happy evenings and most delightful of papas: nov pouring water into a tumbler with the yellow fluid from th other bottle, and just as we return to our forgotten tea anc neglected seed-cake, taking a silver knife from his waistcoa pocket, and, with a few deft incisions and most artful scrapings converting an orange into a human countenance.

A broad-mouthed, grinning, open-nostriled, small-eyed yellow face laid on a napkin across the top of a wine-glass, bowing anc nodding and rolling for our behoof and speaking in papa's voice —saying it does not feel quite well, is afraid it has laughed toc much. Oh dear! Feels sick, dreadfully sick, oh dear, oh dear. Fetch me a basin.

That is the end of the programme. The sickness of the orange induces such a gust of mirth that we cannot swallow our tea and the crumbs of the seed-cake go the wrong way.

Patting us on the back and wiping our tear-stained face, mamma thinks we had better be removed: but papa, the enchanter, looks leniently upon this our great disaster and disgrace; says 'Let her stay. She'll get better directly'; and we feel that, after all, our offence is but a tribute to his power.

But the wrath of papa! Storms of anger more violent and fiercer—as it seemed to us—than the fury of nature: the thunder-clap that shook our chimneys and caused the grown-up ground-floor lodgers to scream, or the hail-storm that burst upon us one morning near the so-called Marble Arch—tornadoes which made a little girl want to creep under the sofa until they had blown themselves out. Vi especially remembered two such storms.

The first was occasioned by a truly horrible incident. The maid or mamma—mamma with a white face and trembling hands appeared to confess her guilt—had maltreated the newest pair of those sombre trousers, officiously folding them sideways instead of frontways, mercilessly pinning them in the queer machine, and leaving them all through the cold hours of a long winter's night to suffer the torment of distortion and constraint: so that they crept forth next day with the abominable traces of their torture marked in rigid, ineffaceable lines which seem to cry to papa for vengeance.

The second was even more appalling because it seemed to spring up without either cause or warning.

Mamma had offered to go with Vi and call for papa at his club—the place to which papa was compelled to go every day—and take him away in her four-wheeler. Surely there could be no harm in such a suggestion, of which Vi heartily approved. But it threw papa into a white heat of rage—which no apologies could appease—changing to a cold, half-suppressed fury as he left us in our tears and disgrace, and making the smaller of us for the moment wish that the thin, shining-booted, black figure stalking down the street might never again return to cause mamma to cry like this.

Yet it was the same papa, so soon afterwards, smiling his odd self-contained smile, listening attentively, and full of quaint suggestion and illumined advice, as we relate our experience with the orange pip which had struck against and nearly uprooted our well-known loose tooth.

'And that is the very pip!' said papa, gravely examining it. 'It must be preserved'—saying this most authoritatively. 'You must keep it until the tooth falls out, and then send them both to the British Museum.'

'Why not keep them here?'

'Because this house might be burned down, or burglars might break in. They will be safer in the custody of the nation.'

It is not for us to argue although we imperfectly u stand.

But suddenly there came from papa an alternative sch a plan so luminous, grown-up, and altogether enticing i scientific aspect that we clapped our hands with delight.

'We will *plant* the pip and grow an orange tree.'

And papa did not condescendingly throw out this bright and then leave his small child to grapple unaided with realisation. He helped us throughout: selected the c marmalade pot; directed us in gathering earth from the backyard; saw that it was properly sifted and pressed dc poured warm water upon the earth with his own hands; made a little speech while we inserted the pip.

'If you want to plant the tooth you must do it yourself added. 'I know little of tooth-culture. Dragon's teeth known to bear a crop—and you hear people speaking of t teeth shooting while still in their heads. A wisdom t might be worth cultivating: its flowers should have a mone value,' etc. etc.

It was quite impossible really to understand papa wher talked like this; but his air of perfect equality, his affability, condescension were very grateful to one.

And papa's knowledge was so profound, so exact, that were safe in trusting him, however difficult belief might be.

Wonder of wonders, our tree grew. After such and so stra vicissitudes, the very pip that had injured us made the glori amends of showing us this incredible performance. Nur and carried about, once overturned, in the window by day, the mantelpiece by night, our jampot, blackened by the s only brightened by the weak Bloomsbury sunbeams struggl through dirty London glass, successfully held this miracle opening life, becoming to us a solace, a study, and a triun as, tremulous with delight, we saw the little eruption of damp earth, then the tiny little spear, the close green sh slowly ascending, unrolling, unfurling two pale little gr leaves. Stranger than the fairy tales which mamma n reads to us, more astonishing than those old dreams, is t bursting of the pip prison, and the escape of the prisor life inside.

And papa knew that it would come to pass, although all us, mamma included, might doubt.

But the growth of our tree is slow. Days, months, ye have rolled by and we are becoming a well-stocked magazine useful knowledge; and still the pale stalk and the two gr

leaves compose the whole of our tree, and from the ground to the very top of the tree is measured by the length of our hand from wrist to nail tips.

It will be a long time—we shall be grown up—before we can eat fruit of our own plucking.

Suddenly, in the middle of winter, there was a bustle and confusion of a most interesting character: packing up for a journey—'in search for some sunshine for mamma,' as papa said to the landlady. Mamma had discontinued Vi's lessons for over a week and was far less excited at the prospect of change than her pupil.

It was Vi's first acquaintance with the seaside. Coming into the town at night, one found it impossible to detect anything novel. The dark streets and wet pavements, as seen from the rattling fly, might have come down from London by a faster train to await the arrival of the visitors: they were so like Bloomsbury.

But next morning, what a revelation!

The broad road, with its wide pavements and gorgeous railings and lamp-posts, stretching away on either hand, beyond the last of the red walls and slate roofs, to bare green slopes and noble heights; and opposite, where one would naturally look for houses, the flat purple plain of water, with grey clouds coming down to join it, white ridges, driven foam, the dull thud of the waves on the beach, and something invisible and tremendous advancing to meet one from the open sea. Wind of course, but *such* wind—like an overpowering, but courteous and excessively grown-up stranger: taking the door out of straining hands, seeming to say 'This is my affair, my dear child. Now lean up against me. There—so,' and banging the door behind one's back with a crash that shakes the house. And Vi had been told by her father not to make a noise. How extremely annoying!

Very little sunshine for mamma, but it is not in the least missed by her daughter. In sunlight or shadow, this Southbourne is truly all that the most exacting could crave—with its polished pebbles, so cold that they numb the fingers, its whirling spray, the salt lash of flying seaweed, and the *clean dirt* below the shingle, with which one is not only permitted, but encouraged, to play. Boats drawn up upon the beach to look at, and hide behind to the alarm of this new guardian, the strange maid; shrimps to buy and carry home to eat with an appetite which nothing can satisfy; the pier, the cliffs, the long walk of nice red bricks; and no lessons—mamma never suggest-

ing that holidays cannot last for ever;—is there anything more for which a reasonable child could conscientiously ask?

Yes, a special messenger to go and fetch the orange tree which, in the flurry of departure, has been forgotten and left behind.

'So likely,' said papa, and suddenly becoming stern and forbidding: 'Understand that you are to keep quiet and not to worry. Your mother is very ill.'

'How ill is she?'

Vi has not dared to ask her father, but has appealed to the strange maid at the first opportunity.

'Just about as bad as bad can be,' said the maid, with lugubrious gusto.

Tears and terror; no joy in waves dancing in sunlight, not beating the beach now, but caressing it, drawing the glittering pebbles with a sound like a sigh; no consolation in shrimps, nor appetite for the nobler prawn; red eyes and sniffing nose: a dull despair more crushing than the burden of that half-forgotten dream of trouble in its most persistent form.

'Pray God bless papa and . . . and make me a good little girl.'

'Vivien! I wish you wouldn't hiccough in your prayers. It makes me laugh and it is wicked to laugh while you are saying your prayers.'

'I did not hiccough,' said Vivien indignantly. 'I only caught my breath.'

It has been one of the last gusts from that great storm of grief breaking down her voice at the passage in the evening petition where the Editor's hand has been at work, making the necessary elision to keep in strict accordance with the tenets of the Protestant faith.

Sent about from place to place, during the red-eyed stupor of her great loss—with papa in London; at the cottage of some humble country friends; in the care of guards on cold journeys; passed from one stranger to another—Vivien had now found a splendid shelter at the mansion of one of the aunts.

'Why not let her come to us for Christmas?' Mrs. Burnett, of Sydenham, had hospitably written.

'Why not?' papa had promptly replied.

It was a noble mansion, with heavy gates, a carriage drive, a large stucco porch, a billiard room, a vast nursery and capacious

cupboards stocked to overflowing with toys: the little-prized property of a company of odious young cousins.

It was Vi's first meeting with domestic splendour, but she looked with an inattentive eye upon the array of beribboned maids, the bustling nurses, the shiny furniture, the long board sturdily bearing its display of Christmas-tide fare—and this offended the proper pride of small girl-relatives.

'Don't pretend you have ever seen anything like it before,' they said, 'because nurse knows, as a fact, that you haven't.'

'I never pretend,' said Vivien.

The cousin's papa, however, was kind, or tried to be kind. He was very big and very red—so different to her papa—incapable of producing laughter even at this glad season, even among his own sycophantic offspring. But he meant well; allowed the good things on the table to talk for him; placed his motherless guest on his right hand; and made frothy creams and mince pies do duty for amusing anecdote and odds and ends of information: pulled crackers instead of cutting jokes.

'No appetite, my dear,' he would whisper with his mouth full, while he loaded Vi's plate. 'Oh I can't allow any excuses. Christmas comes but once a year.'

And Vi, detecting the compassionate thought and the kindly ring in the gross voice, with difficulty repressed one of those offending hiccoughs.

He was a 'great merchant,' said the juvenile chatter of the nursery; 'a merchant prince,' said the nursery governess; 'could buy up 'arf the city of London,' said the least of all he nursery-maids.

The trouble upstairs, in the children's suite of apartments, was Lawrence, the small boy-cousin.

A terrible boy: a human crab who used to pinch her, and all the others. Heavy-eyed, and deliberate in his movements, in the midst of older boys, lurking in dark corners or slowly creeping out when all attention was engaged, he would very slowly, insidiously, imperceptibly take complete possession of a small fold of flesh—while all the world was leaning over the table looking at pictures in Christmas numbers—and then close his awful forceps, giving one a most atrocious pinch.

By this 'pince,' as he called it in his baby lisp, he had come to dominate the nursery, establishing a tyranny to which even his seniors were thrall. For indeed it seemed that by constant exercise his first finger and thumb had developed an abnormal power, or that here was an inconceivable trick of nature: an altogether impossible reversion to a characteristic of an immensely remote crustacean progenitor. Sidling along the big

nursery sofa he would, at his approach, send little reading girls, who were seated at the end of it, flying in panic. He spoke hardly at all, and his few words fell in the shape of threats big with a prospect of endless misery. They were not to scream under the work of finger and thumb, or to complain: 'Tell if you dare. Tell and get me reproved, but I shall be here—with my pince to make all scores even and leave a balance in my favour,' was the substance of his threatening.

According to his trembling victims he had not always escaped punishment. There was a tale of horror: of a little, pale, curly darling in white satin and point lace, son and heir to another great merchant-prince, reluctantly torn from a splendid, calling mother, sent shivering to enjoy himself in the nursery, and pinced almost to death. Such a catastrophe as this could not be hidden, and papa, it was said, had flogged the wretch with furious energy—a flogging borne with crab-like indifference.

But this was doubtful to Vi. If it was true, why should the authorities now ignore the misery still caused? Why should nurses seem to refuse to see what passed under their eyes, to encourage the silence created by the strange perverted sense of nursery honour and the dread of the consequences of complaint—the inefficient protection of those in power and the vengeance of an active enemy?

It was a lesson in life; and, years afterwards, Vivien reading of hospital, regimental, or prison scandals—of visiting magistrates, officers and doctors going their rounds without suspicion of the old-established abuses and disorders—conjured up the picture of her aunt—'Where's my little Lawrence. Come and kiss mamma,' etc.—embracing her unnatural son. For, whatever effort it cost him, with his arms about his parent's waist, to repress and beat down the craving of his fierce instinct, he was never so mad as to betray himself by indulging it.

An insufferable and most vain-glorious crab too, sitting in the firelight at the hour of dusk, cracking a walnut between finger and thumb and boasting of what he would do at a boarding-school: pince the whole school into submission—thinking, poor wretch, to find his school but a bigger nursery; the world a wider school.

Vivien Shelton was, on the whole, a well-behaved, inoffensive child: but one could not keep her for ever. That would be to allow oneself to be imposed upon by one's brother—there was no other word for it—to be wholly imposed upon by a half-brother. Mrs. Burnett, therefore, set to work again with her heavy gold-mounted pen and her fine monogramed paper, and,

in due course, received directions to pack off her niece, under the charge of a railway guard or an intelligent-looking stranger (papa was so thoughtful!) to the address of Mrs. Maitland's school for the daughters of gentlemen at Southbourne.

It was the only place in the empire to which Vi would have wished to avoid being sent: but she was not consulted.

Seen through the frosty panes of a third-class carriage, as the train came near to the end of its journey, the now desolate downs, the wind-swept marshlands, and the far-off glimmer of a sad, dark sea, filled her with despair, opened up the wideness of irreparable loss, let loose the imperfectly locked gates of tears, so that it was a wretched-looking sort of new pupil to be discovered by the German governess who had come to meet her.

'So. You are smaller than her for whom I have looked, said the governess. 'But not so small as to cry when going to a comfortable school. Use your handkerchief, little one, and komm!'

III

MRS. MAITLAND, the lady principal, was kind to Vi Shelton; and the girls were quite wrong in saying that Arundel House was the worst school in Europe. It was not even the worst school in Southbourne — this fast-expanding town of schools of all sorts for both sexes. It was a cheap school, but, on the whole, it was a nice school. Boys—as is well known—are a race so destructive, voracious, and inappeasable that a boys' school, if cheap, must be nasty also. But it is surprising—to those who have never tried the experiment—at how small a cost girls can be decently reared.

The pity of course is that when reared they should not always be wanted.

There was no hurry in learning your book. That was the message whispered in the hundred schools of Southbourne. No hurry! Take it easy. Schools were not schools, when considered philosophically, but wonderful life-waiting rooms. Time, till the grown-up life-train started, was, in the boys' schools, like a blue-bottle on a window pane—something to be killed: in the girls' schools, it was like stays—something to be borne without complaint, which should not be mentioned, which could be forgotten and then no longer felt.

No hurry. Never let us forget it. Summers languorously waned, autumns crisply fell, winters roared upon the sea until spring came shrilly whistling from the downs and drove the bathing-machines, from the waste place where they had been crouching and groaning, back to the cold publicity of beach and surf once more; that ostentatious but truly splendid nobleman, Lord George Sanger, came and went: and thus the long years glided. Sometimes, to little boys and girls parading on the slopes of the bold headland, shreds of white cloud would fall from the dappled sky and linger on the horizon, declaring themselves to be the chalk cliffs of far-off France. Indistinct, uncertain, just where sky melted into sea, a faint outline of land—or a bank of mist—would challenge thought and observation. Fifty, sixty miles away—impossible! It was like life—

the life of a free and untrammeled grown-up—too remote to be worth the labour of thought.

The crocodile march was horrid, but the half hour before tea was sweet. When days were short and dusk was falling, they would make Emily Richards—the girl with the even voice and the just intonation—read aloud to them. The authorities did not hold the use of gas justified before tea-time; but when Emily had been established on the form near the fire-place, some one would produce an end of candle and foster its flame so jealously—walking round and round, guarding it from draught with an open hand,—that she made it quite safe, but of small service to the reader.

Above all else they loved the fairy tales. In Mrs. Maitland's latticed bookcase there were certain permitted volumes of tales adapted by a lady of quality from Gallic sources. They were pretty, foolish tales.

The fairy prince—mortal in desire, fairylike in his methods, petted godchild of the immortals, possessed of all the good things of the earth also—was the dominant figure. He was at best a dandified, Frenchified princekin with an innate passion for mésalliance, refusing the marriage of convenience which wise friends knew was the one thing to make a man of him, wandering off to play the fool with impossible Goose-girls, and so feeble and resourceless as a suitor that he must needs make princesses of them as a first step to their favour. Jingling, jangling, preposterous little prince on a long-tailed horse, he was adored by the girls of Arundel House. They almost swooned with ecstasy—some of them—as Emily, in her clear, full tones, recited his splendid coronation of his beggar-bride; and in the darkness, sufficient now to hide a blush, they wished that they were Goose-girls.

Which was exactly what Fräulein Bauermann called them when she came in to light the gas.

'Is there no Shakespeare you could read? Or am I misinformed there was an English poet of that name!' asked Miss Bauermann with heavy irony. 'Have you no newspaper to read with more sense than such fiddle-de-dee? Besides, if fairy tales you must, why not at least Scandinavian, or our German-derived, read? But this French! Oh no.'

'Oh Fräulein. They are lovely.'

'But fairy tales are all bad,' Miss Bauermann would continue. 'They with persistence encourage the Dream and the Dream-habit and make unfit for Life and Life-work. I can see by your stupid eyes, looking all at me like owls, wishing me to

turn out again the gas, how bad they are: So if I asked you "Now will you have your tea and bread and butter or go back to your Dream?" You shall say "The Dream if you please Fräulein." I will advise Mrs. Maitland to forbid them.'

'Oh Fräulein, you *couldn't* do anything so mean and unkind.'

'It is what I will do.'

But she never did, of course. She was a good sort, Fräulein. And she had a way of reading your thoughts—hitting off by a fluke precisely what a girl was thinking at the moment—that was rather amusing. Not such a fool as she looked—the girls admitted it ungrudgingly.

From the first, Vivien's best friend had been quite an old girl—one Marian Draper. It was Marian who had instructed her young friend in all the ways and by-ways of school-existence —from the use and abuse of the globes to the method of making Fräulein talk about the Leipzig School of Medicine during lesson time.

Marian had red hair and the most lovely blue eyes you ever saw. They were quite dark by gaslight, but by day, and especially in sunshine, they were the strong blue of a cloudless sky or the water on the wild north coast of Devon where Marian had been born. Her father—she told Vivien—was Vicar of a little stone-built village, and the most beautiful church in the world, perched on the biggest of all the green hill-tops, with the slate walls of the tremendous cliffs close to the lich-gate—so close that when the wind had howled all night above the vicarage chimneys, Marian and her brothers and sisters in the morning always looked first at the black beach before they raised their eyes to the place where the church ought to be.

She told Vivien also of the richness of the Devonshire pasture, of the richness of the Devonshire meat, and of the fabulous, unbelievable, Monte Cristo richness of the Devonshire cream; and, while she spoke of all these wonders of the west, she showed the softened eye, the tremor of voice, the glowing face of the true Devonian far away from the loved land.

'Oh Vi, you must come and see for yourself. Oh Vi, you must come home with me next time.'

Vivien found a friend too in the solid Miss Bauermann. Their friendship began with an odd little secret between themselves and shared by none. One day, when the crocodile was waiting for the word of command to march, tragedy broke its ranks. A milkcart, rattling round the corner, ran over a dog, and killed it. All the girls suffered, but Vivien suffered most

of all. She thought she was to blame: the dog had been looking at her when the death-dealing cart struck it. She could not sleep at night; she sat with staring eyes by day; and at last, after three days, the doctor was sent for. The doctor suggested a pill, and hoped he would find the patient better in the morning.

'Vifien are you awake? So. As I have thought.'

Miss Bauermann had come to her in the middle of the night, while all the school slept; and now, sitting on the edge of the bed, she became gaily guttural.

'Ach. I haf some most glorious news for you. That little dog was not killed.'

'Oh Fräulein, how do you know?'

But Fräulein stoutly maintained that she did know. Some great physician had taken the case in hand, and so completely restored the dog that it could now 'leap and run and gambolling play.' Miss Bauermann knew: but no one else was to know for the present.

'In confidenz I haf early told you who love dogs. But it is a secret confidenz between you and me. Now sleep little one. Happy dreams.'

Oh the exquisite relief in the respite from pain! No more tearing of entrails as imagination drags out the unseen strong and clear as the seen, remorselessly driving us on from the torment of fact through each phase of the infinite torture of fancy. Respite from pain, the warm comfort of tears, sleep—and in the morning our doctor taking all the credit, believing that he had lowered the temperature, steadied the pulse, and cured the patient with his silly old pill. Miss Bauermann, smiling and thinking perhaps of the Leipzig School of Medicine, felt that she could spare the doctor his little triumph; but she was obdurate when Vivien often pleaded for permission to let one or two girls into the secret.

'Not yet must you tell. I am myself not sorry because to you it is a good lesson. Confidenz is sacred. You must never betray. That is vile—to betray a confidenz. For whatever cause it is ever vile.'

Then sometimes branching into ethical discussion—a philosophical consideration of any abstract question being Fräulein's only notion of a cosy chat—she would give Vi her views on Reticenz as a feminine virtue.

'Unt still keep something to yourself you will not tell to any. What! Your own poet, Vifien, and it is I, a foreigner, who first quotes it. Fie! I would myself have written *most* things, not only somm. Reticenz for us women is what courage to a

man can be—to my mind. It is that what gives the price to the gift a woman can give—herself. If to all without reticenz, then how is one more given than the rest? How shall her indulgenz and complaisenz in the after-cold of his strong reasoned thought remain so all-superlative in price but as told by her reticenz to all but him?'

When Fräulein chatted in this cosy fashion it was impossible not to regret that it should, as it were, be all wasted—out of class.

'I haf spoken of great things—of the crown of a woman's life—but in the very small the same I say. Reticenz, Reticenz. *Unt* still keep something to yourself.'

Then perhaps, with a fair breeze of Teutonic eloquence behind her, Fräulein would spread her sails and run on from this narrow channel of root-idea to the broad sea of not-quite-to-be-so-easily-grasped secondary deductions, and, suddenly remembering that she had a small consort, would bring up into the wind's eye in order to find out if the little craft was safely following in her wake.

'Haf you so far comprehended?' she would ask abruptly.

And Vivien would be forced to confess: Not one word!

'Ach! You baby English girls! When does *your* reasoned thought begin—twenty—thirty—more?'

'But no,' she added resolutely. 'I will have my lesson go home somehow. See. You are to pretend I am speaking truth . . . Vifien, I am unhappy because I have killed one. Yes a cruel murder committed I know not why. I was mad, but now the police hunt me. . . . Oh! My God, there is one. A policeman. Oh Vivien! *Now*, quick, answer now. Shall you tell him?'

'Oh no Fräulein. I couldn't—even if it wasn't pretence.'

'Komm! That rings true after all. And haf no fear but you would rightly do to keep my confidenz. Let him who is paid find out himself if he can. When you are old enough to comprehend I will expose the governing logic of the why-you-would-rightly-do.'

Good old Fräulein—as the girls used to say.

There were difficulties about one's clothes and about one's holidays. When the lady principal and her pupil had agreed that the time was ripe for discarding and re-stocking, and both were of a mind as to cut and fashion, there would come a mysterious delay. Mrs. Maitland's voice, at the moment for issuing the orders, would fail, her hand become paralysed; and, without a word of explanation, the new hat, frock, or jacket

would disappear beneath a cloud of doubt and indecision. It would have been pleasant to spend a vacation with Marian, delightful to spend vacations with papa—as one ventured to say in one's letters. But Colonel Shelton was busy, harassed by business it seemed, unable to understand in the press of his affairs what had checked the Devonshire trip. It was not convenient to Colonel Shelton to receive his daughter for these particular holidays. It never was convenient to Colonel Shelton.

Thus our hope-meter, rising again and again towards the realisation of the westward scheme, regularly sank as breaking-up grew nearer; and, after touching Papa, Rail-fare, Dress-maker, and other such imaginary marks, indicated nothing but Solitude, Secret-tears, and Stifled-repinings at the very bottom of the ingenious contrivance.

Mrs. Maitland was kind in term-time, but in the holidays she was very kind. It was said by all the school that she was a most dreadful *stinge*, but in the holidays she almost made one forget her notorious defect. She used to tell Vivien that a schoolmistress was like a queen in this respect: she must have no favourites.

'Yet she often has,' and she smiled. 'I wouldn't tell you that if it wasn't the holidays.'

In long rambling walks she proved herself an agreeable conversationalist—and a far more tolerant listener than Fräulein. It was not all propounding on her side and acquiescence on ours.

'What a pet of a cloak!'—After passing a fashionably dressed visitor; and Vivien would not hesitate to add, 'Wouldn't you like one just the same?'

'Well, my dear, I would and I wouldn't. You will perhaps be surprised to hear that I have at home a really fine ermine cape that I acquired over two years ago and have never yet worn.'

'Oh, but *why*?'

'I could hardly say. Want of energy perhaps. Ermine is very regal. To carry it off properly one wants to be so fine.'

'But so you are—on Sundays.'

'No Vi'—although obviously gratified by the compliment—'I am *not* a good dresser. I think I *could* be if I had the leisure to give to it. I had a fancy the ermine cape seemed to ask for purple, so I waited. I bought the material, but I've never had it made up. I fear I am rather given to *hoarding* with regard to clothes.'

Vi winced at the ugly notion of stingeing carried even into the wardrobe.

'What about moth?'

'Ah,' and Mrs. Maitland winced in her turn. 'I'll tell you what, Vi. You shall help me go through my things. One can't be too careful.'

Then, without perceptible transition from the clothes, they would find themselves weighing the problem of free will and predestination.

'But how can that be?' says Vivien warmly: pausing and boldly confronting Mrs. Maitland on a field track. 'Do you mean to say it can be known how I am going out of this field—through that gate or the other one—and yet I am free to choose which gate I like. Oh that *must* be nonsense.'

'Do not talk in that way Vivien. It is most improper—impious. Respect for me should at least—'

It was very rarely that Mrs. Maitland stopped an argument in this manner, and then only because the subject had been sufficiently ventilated or had become dangerous—never, of course, because she felt herself floored.

'Mrs. Maitland, if I were to come into a gigantic fortune.'—This was a form of profitless speculation which Bauermann would not for a moment have permitted. 'If I had a million, I would buy you a chariot with powdered servants and everything, and a purple satin gown so that you could carry off that cape.'

'I am much obliged to you. And what else would you do pray?'

'I would give Marian a hundred or a thousand a year so that she need never be afraid of having to earn her own living. She is, you know.' Similar allowances would be settled on other friends, and papa's life would be arranged for him, 'a palace' provided, etc. etc.

'And might I inquire what you would do for yourself, my dear?'

Vivien looks puzzled.

'I have been saying what I would do. All that I have said.' Then taking Mrs. Maitland's hand, 'What would *you* do?'

'Retire,' said Mrs. Maitland promptly. 'But what a little Alnaschar you are. . . . A fable in the *Arabian Nights*. Yes, you may read it. . . . A satire. . . . Well, a tale mocking at folk who indulge in idle dreams—'

'Why retire?' asks Vi, linking fingers caressingly. 'Are you tired of it?'

'Yes and no, Vi. I am wofully tired sometimes. There are anxieties which you could not understand. And for another reason. I should miss it—but I think I should be happier with

say half a dozen girls of a certain age to whom I could devote myself—*finishing* them.'

'Would you let me be one?'

'Yes dear. Yes,' says Mrs. Maitland with a curious whispered decision, as though talking to herself rather than to her companion. 'That is what I would do. In some pretty spot—by the Mediterranean I think. A long low house—no stairs to tire one—in a terraced garden—orange trees and a palm or two, and behind, the hillside and the grey olives.'

'Oh lovely! I seem to see it.'

'And living is so cheap out there. It would need no great wealth—a competence—no more.'

'But you have a million—don't forget.'

'A million! Ah! Then I should indeed have no hesitation, but join forces with Mrs. Gardiner—an old friend of mine—the Honourable Mrs. Gardiner—the daughter of a peer—who spends her life watching over poor girls. Not gentlefolk—poor girl-toilers. With her knowledge and *my* wealth, we would indeed make a harbour of refuge. Men can be very cruel to us women Vi—and there are times when souls—and bodies—may be saved at small outlay. Our house would be no hotel for the wicked. No. Certainly not. But it would be open to—*Ah!*'

Mrs. Maitland sighs, shakes her hand free from Vivien, and turns upon her with reproachful tones.

'You little imp! I never met with such an Alnaschar. You seem to mesmerise one.'

After such a walk, and after the high tea, mistress and pupil would pass the long evening in the pleasant study with the latticed bookshelves. Vivien always had a new novel—by the late Mr. Dickens, the late Mr. Thackeray, or the late Sir W. Scott, Baronet,—and Mrs. Maitland had *her* book—the ledger in which she traced with absorbing interest the recorded progress from quarter to quarter of Mary Bates, Kate Jones, or Adelaide Patterson. It grieved the child, glancing up from her bright shadow-world, to see the dame thus brooding over dry and almost sordid facts. In the careworn face, the poised pencil, the eager calculating look in the eyes, there was too strong a suggestion of the miser counting his prospective gains and gloating over the tale of his garnered hoard.

In spite of her kindness and our own affection, one could not doubt, seeing her thus engaged, that Mrs. Maitland was in her heart of hearts—a terrible old stinge.

No hurry! That was the message whispered by the other unwieldy caimans, as the trailing crocodile crawled in the

hot sun, along the parade and by the red brick extension below the hill.

Sometimes, unexpectedly debouching upon the sea front, a boys' school would come bravely swinging—nearly cutting us in two, making us lose formation, from our dread lest the fierce, overpowering sex should trample us beneath their feet. In ascending scale, from squeaky childhood to husky adolescence, the boy-regiment goes marching by. It was not really hurrying, yet already nothing but its choking dust is left.

'Why cannot you pull yourselves together,' says Miss Sanderson fretfully, 'and step out like that?'

We cannot Miss Sanderson. We are girls, not boys. And please Fräulein in your all-wisdom forgive us if, as in crocodile we crawl, we sway ourselves to rest with the dream-habit. It is a languorous afternoon; the warm breeze is enervating rather than tonic; it is wicked not to allow us to sit down and do the thing in comfort: but as dream-walkers only can we be kept going.

He has come to us, through the summer haze, in the sleepy murmur of the sea—our glorious, ineffably sweet dream-prince. And we are giving ourselves to him, as the greedy sun-flower gives itself to the sun, as the thirsty wavering-stalked lilies give themselves to the rain of a summer night—absolutely without reticence.

To each dreamer he is a different prince, but for all he works his dream-wonder. Plastic to thought, assuming the shape of our desire and glorifying it, he causes us to shed our cruelly inadequate outer husk, to emerge in the splendour and loveliness of our innermost secret selves—dream-princesses without spot or blemish—not one eruption on forehead or lip, not one hang-nail left—worthy at last to sink upon his breast in a long shivering ecstasy of dream-surrender.

When our crocodile has thus sunned itself to sleep, it needs more than a Bauermann to rouse it. Nothing less stimulating then is required than a runaway goat-carriage, or the advance guard of the eccentric, but consistently magnificent, Lord George—three mounted Turks, and some elephants.

As the years rolled by it seemed to Vivien that she searched in vain for the once genial light behind the gold-framed windows of Miss Bauermann's broad façade, and that she only found a chilling disapproval.

'Haf you climbed the höchste Spitze of learning that you turn so listless? Can you no more acquire in idle hours that you must ever be playing like a baby with the others?'

'Marian and I have been reading Shakespeare together,' Vivien urged in self-defence.

'Marian!' said Miss Bauermann contemptuously. 'Marian! I wish she were gone. She is a bad comrade for you.'

'Fräulein! She is so good and kind.'

'Good and kind! As a cow is good. And as water weak.' Vivien felt this to be very unjust.

'For a friend I would say that little girl—How do you call her?—that daughter of a baker mocked at by all should be to you worth a hundred Marians. Cultivate her, Vifien. There is much in the brain of that child.'

This Maud Hopkins—daughter of a Camden Town baker—although comparatively a new girl, had sprung into notoriety by reason of her powers of penmanship. A demure and pasty-faced little author, like a spider she would retire into corners, and spin. In the midst of the racket it became a wonder to all to watch the small unfaltering hand fly over the paper—copy-books, backs of letters, any scraps and odd pieces—as she wove the endless web of her nonsense. It *was* nonsense. There seemed no end and no beginning—a meaningless cobweb of rather unusual words.

Maud had sought Vivien's friendship or patronage, and shown a troublesome disposition to discuss literary matters from a professional point of view. Is not development of character a higher branch of the business than neat construction or ingenious plot, etc. etc.? And once she paid a queer compliment.

'You alone appear to see no real infamy in exchanging the staff of life for money'—wording it so quaintly that one had to laugh while assuring her of one's esteem.

One half-holiday she craved Vivien's company for an authorised walk with some girl-friends and their governess; and in the course of the excursion the party became involved with—boys. They were brothers and cousins of Maud's yellow-haired friends, and they all walked together till they came to the end of the red bricks.

Here the boys swarmed over and through the railings, and dropped heavily upon the slimy rocks below. For a little while the girls looked down at them as though they had been bears in a bear pit. They were about to play some boy-game, and were discussing how. But one—quite small—would roar from excitement, maddening himself in a kind of savage delight. 'Oh shut up.' But he would not. Indeed he could not: the fury in him must find vent.

'Will you shut up?' Then a big boy, twisting the arm of

his junior in a horrible fashion, began mercilessly to punch the strained muscles with a clenched fist. It was pitiful. Vivien turned away feeling sick and faint. The fierce blows rained—thud, thud, thud—and still he bellowed. Then, gradually, the yells lessened, broke, and ceased, and his natural voice was heard again.

'Pax. Give me pax.'

Vivien saw his face: eyes dry and burning, no reproach of the torturer in their steady gaze. So young, so fierce, and without tears. Incredible!

She expressed her opinion to Marian that evening.

'I do not, and never should, like boys.'

'Oh wait. Wait dear. You don't know what you are talking about. You *must* come home—with me—next vac—and then—then—'

Marian's voice seemed to die away. Her blue eyes became more blue, with that soft, far-off, yearning, Devonshire creamy look in them.

The girls had their authorised sports—Prisoners' base, etc. etc., but others were strictly prohibited—such as sliding down the banisters. 'Can I believe my eyes?' Once tops broke out and spread like wildfire. All the world were turned into lob-bowlers, battering wainscots and booming against doors with their unceasing No-balls. Then the marriage service had a vogue. One aged girl—Nellie Preston—used to recite the old-fashioned words in the vicar's voice, but with a mischievous, giggling relish. 'Now repeat after me.' And our bridegroom would repeat, 'With my body I thee worship,' devoid of thought or care as to the meaning of the archaic formula. It was a surprise to find Mrs. Maitland as bitterly determined to stamp out the marriage service as she had been resolute to suppress tops.

Now, in this winter term, that horrid and forbidden *greening* had come in again and was extraordinarily fashionable.

Vivien forgot greening on the shortest day of all the year—her birthday. She was fourteen to-day. To-morrow every one else would be going away. They were packing now: the fever of breaking-up was in the air.

'Vi Shelton wanted,' Edie Pryce came calling. 'Visitor for you. Think it must be your father—tall, distinguished-looking man—in the drawing-room. Come to fetch you for the holidays.'

Vi Shelton flew. But of course there was nobody in the drawing-room. It was only greening.

'Sold again,' cried Edie. 'I say Vi you *are* jolly green. Any one can catch you. You're not going to blub about it?'

Not then, in presence of the greener, but later, before the lady principal, did Vi Shelton exhibit the weakness of tears.

'Won't he—he want me—ever?'

'My dear Vi, he must and *shall*,' said Mrs. Maitland. 'There, I promise. You shall go home next holidays as sure as I sit here.'

IV

VIVIEN had come home for the holidays to papa's lodgings in Berkeley Street, Chelsea.

'Steady with the box,' said Mrs. Page, papa's landlady. 'Clumsy feller! It *is* a big 'un though.'

Vivien looked round the shabby sitting-room and shivered.

'Here you are—why you're quite a young lady and your pa spoke of you as a tiny tot. . . . Yes he's out and won't be back till late. But to-morrow he's a-going to give you a treat—an all day out, if not a drencher. And your dinner he ordered his own self. "A sole and a sweetbread, Mrs. Page—so digestible for children," says your pa, "and something nice from the pastrycook."'

The visitor's sensation of numbing cold melted beneath the warm stream of kind words. What a dear thoughtful papa, after all. The fire in the iron grate began to glow with home-like welcome. This was home. There were papa's books—Peerages, Landed Gentrys, Army Lists. There was the trouser-pressing machine.

The dinner was charmingly served by kind, if foolish, Mrs. Page. Her favourite subject for discourse appeared to be the colonel, for whom she plainly entertained a profound admiration.

Vivien's grey eyes shone with pride.

'Well—you know I've been in service—with the best families—but I never see such perfect manners. So easy, yet so grand with it all—But you're neglecting your dinner miss—My talk—?'

'No, please go on—I like it.'

'Why true—You ought to be very proud of your pa. I've heard him with my own ears to my girl—me standing on the kitchen flight quite unknown to him—"My complimins to your mistress—yes my complimins (with a pause to enjoy the gratifying word) and bid her be so good as procure me a copy of the *Mornin' Post.*"

'But, mind you, he's spoilt me for other lodgers,' she adds with foolish complacency.

'Yes, miss—he's kept my spirits up. I've 'ad a lot of trouble—with my 'usband—and my stepson. Not to speak of the landlord. We are all under the Earl of Eaglesham about here—ground landlord you know—and the leases running out. I suppose he presses on them you know, and they press cruel hard on us—knowing he'll show 'em no mercy at the end of the lease. There's three between him and me you'll understand, but it's *him* that I blame—and a great nobleman too! What makes it so cruel is the neighbourhood's going down. This street isn't what it was. There's parties in the house opposite ain't no better than they ought to be—and the same thing, only worse, in 'arf the houses lower down—towards the river—'

Vivien expressed sympathy because Mrs. Page had become doleful. It was a relief when she picked up her favourite thread and her weak colourless face brightened.

'Your pa's too good for this street. . . . I shall stop my chatter if you don't eat. It's the colonel who's encouraged me to run on like I do. What a man with the ladies! I wonder he ain't never given you another ma before now. Your pa's like a boy when he gets among the ladies. Like a naughty boy,' and she tittered.

It seemed to Vivien, lying awake that night in the darkness of her small room at the back of the house, that she was a little child again. Memories rendered sleep impossible. The street was more silent than the Bloomsbury street, and there was no sound within doors but the ticking of a clock on the stairs. No other real sound to break the oppressive silence, as she knew; but so many ghosts of sounds! For instance: the sound of doors softly opened and closed; then a footstep approaching our door; the turning of the handle, and the footstep close to our bed, and that light fluttered breath—with fatal unguessed meaning in its hurry—now gently panting by our pillow. But O ghost of that loved dead voice may not you too come to us?

'Vi—my darling. You ought to have been asleep hours ago.'

Then the evil wakeful spell used to be broken and we slept. Suddenly, as in those dead Bloomsbury nights, papa comes home. Now he is walking about in his room immediately beneath ours. Flushed by a daring hope or unreasoned baby-girl fancy, Vi is more feverishly wide-awake than ever. He will know where we are sleeping, or ought to be sleeping—will it occur to him, when he has put on his slippers, to come up and break the spell for us by a midnight word of kindly greeting?

Evidently, it does *not* occur to him. Ere long we realise

that he has gone to bed, and is—yes—no, it is a sad wind rising from the lonely river, or the swinging branches of neglected trees in some deserted garden. But no again, it *is* our papa, rhythmically, steadily snoring.

'And now, Miss Vivien,' said Colonel Shelton at breakfast—'I am your slave for the day. Command me—'

It really was too much of an honour.

'Everything smiles upon us—the weather forecast is propitious. Where shall we go?'

He had been glancing through the morning paper, and, while he read, Vivien had timidly studied him. He was the same, and yet not the same. Something had gone from him: something had come to him. He was older and thinner; the big beaklike nose seemed more prominent, in a narrower face; the hollows on the sides of his temples were more hollow; and there were bluish shadows and minute purple pencillings of surface veins which were quite new and strange. He had less hair of any colour, and far less of the black hair which she remembered. Had there been *any* grey? Certainly there had been none white. Majesty and awe-inspiring force had slipped from the outer case of our Parent-mystery.

Now, with his good-humoured and yet enigmatical smiles, his kindly but still ambiguous phrases, and the light so keen and nevertheless so uncertain of his moving eyes, he was recovering his child: spanning the gulf of years with a rapidly-constructed bridge of bantering conversation.

'There is Madam Tussaud's *par exemple.* The proper study of mankind is man. Would you like to see the immortality which can be given by wax? Or the Zoo? The Tower—most interesting to historical students. Or the Crystal Palace—or—bright idea! *Greenwich?* What say you, young lady? Choose for yourself.'

'It is so difficult. They all sound so nice.—The Tower of course would be—'

'One moment! I should have said that in the event of your selecting Greenwich—we should go there by water—on a steamer—and would see the Tower *en passant.*'

'Oh then Greenwich *please.* I should love that.'

'Quite sure?'

'Quite. Thank you papa. It *is* good of you.'

'Good—nonsense. It will be as much a treat to me as to you Indeed, I will now confess, Greenwich was what I *hoped* you would choose. At the birthplace of Eliza, I can combine a little business with my pleasure.'

Then, the matter being settled so pleasantly, the light seemed to die out of papa's eyes, the shadow of a gloomy cloud seemed to fall upon his animated face, and he became, in a moment, absorbed by his *Morning Post.*

He really was very little altered. Here were the same sombre clothes, the rigid lines of the trousers as they fell stiff and straight about his fleshless legs, the long narrow feet in varnished boots, and the same scrupulous attention displayed as he took the white silk scarf from Mrs. Page and wrapped it carefully about his skinny throat. This black overcoat might be the very same old garment, but for the astrachan collar and cuffs and the grand frogs and braidings.

As he took his shining hat he looked steadily at his young companion.

'Let us inspect her, Mrs. Page. You are not exactly at the top of the fashion, Vi, but no matter. That hat is certainly démodé. Not the newest shape—eh, Mrs. Page? Why do they still dress you in black—I wonder. But what is this? The jacket! Turn round—again. This is not right of Mrs. Maitland. It is simply worn out.'

Vi had trembled and turned pale. Her black cloth jacket had been patched and pressed and let out and added to and generally tinkered for so many years, and now the April sunshine seemed to mock at it in its decrepitude, striking out rainbow fire from polished napless surfaces, and breaking its dark-toned folds into a scale of undesirable tints: browns and greens and neutral blues—but never once illuminating a true strong-bodied black.

'What can we do?' said Colonel Shelton disconsolately. 'Does your wardrobe offer no alternative?'

'I have a grey fur tippet—just for the neck. It I wear that I can do without this.'

'Fetch it—' said Colonel Shelton. Then—'Much better: far more *comme il faut.*'

'You don't think, sir, she will feel the want of the coat?' said Mrs. Page.

'Never, I should imagine,' said Colonel Shelton, looking at the disgraced garment, 'if she takes any pride in her personal appearance. . . . Oh, you mean to keep her warm.—The day promises to be fair. What do you think Vivien?'

Vivien was absolutely certain that she would not feel cold.

As they made their way through ugly streets that led to the river's side, Colonel Shelton pointed out the characteristics of the worst period of English architecture, and touched upon the depressing influences of London.

'Why don't you come and live at Southbourne?' said Vi, shyly sliding her hand into his. 'I wish you would.'

'Alas my dear we are not free agents. But'—disengaging his hand—'you mustn't do that. Does Mrs. Maitland allow girls of your age to walk in that manner? It is not becoming. Indeed it is never done—except by infants or vulgarians.'

She explained that it was only a silly trick taught her by the girls and not advised by the authorities.

On the steamboat pier an inclination to use her handkerchief and a sense of absolute disaster simultaneously possessed her. It would be too dreadful! She would not believe it. Then, first in abstraction, and immediately afterwards from panic, she sniffed violently. She had left it in the jacket on the chair!

Papa was quick to understand, and bore the shock better than one dared to hope. He offered a soft, silk, perfumed, cream-coloured, folded, splendid friend in need.

'Give it to Mrs. Page on your return,' said its owner: grimly but not ferociously.

Then came the boat and they were soon fairly started on their journey. It was quite early in April and there were few passengers. Above the stone wall of the embankment the budding plane-trees feebly strove to hide the red bricks and white woodwork of stately and fantastic houses. Huge factories, strange towers, and monstrous chimneys, rising out of the water on the further shore, slipped by dark and frowning—work confronting wealth, and ever reminding the spic and span, desirable residences—'But for us you could not have been.' Sunshine and movement, dancing water, gardens, more houses—an unrolling panorama that suffers sudden eclipses as bridge after bridge looms, descends, and sparkles again astern in its splendour of sunlit spring-painted iron.

But it was cold. There was the print of the wind flying across the surface of the river, then the fierce patter of the rain—gone in a minute. Nature in her frolicsome spring mood, but with that touch of cruelty in her fun which Vivien knows of already. Very soon the teeth of Vivien began to chatter.

'What the dickens are you doing?' asked the colonel.

But she would not confess.

'Only a trick I learnt at school.'

'I'm afraid they teach you some queer tricks,' said papa, with displeasure in his voice, as he turned up his fur collar. 'Come over here.'

On a bench behind the sheltering paddle-box it was warmer

and altogether more comfortable, although one lost a certain amount of the view.

'When we come to where David Copperfield washed the bottles, will you tell me papa?'

'Oh, you know your Dickens already, young lady.'

And indeed, it seemed that her acquaintance with that particular Master was greater than papa's, for he soon puzzled his daughter by confounding Nigel—when cited as a waterside character—with somebody out of *Great Expectations*. But he knew Mr. Thackeray.

'Ever read the *Book of Snobs*, Vi? No? Ah, read that Marvellous book! As true now as on the day it was written.'

Vi's impressions of Greenwich were altogether pleasant.

Endless piles of noble buildings, great spaces behind high railings, with extraordinarily polite guardians—salt-seasoned veterans—at the gates, anxious to tell you where to find everything. Outside the gates tramways, dirty streets, and a hill—with a balloon—no, the top of the observatory. Inside, when one had found one's way, still nobler buildings of grey stone, stretching far on either hand, twin domes, and vast cloisters running back—the chapel, as we are told, on one side: the painted hall, on the other. The painted hall, lofty beyond belief: stone floor, and pictures all round, reaching high, out of sight and sense, prevailing tone dull gold, rich brown—the marmalade pudding of school, but gilded, and with coloured fruit—sea fights most terrible—sailors stabbing, grasping, tearing in the water itself. Then the Nelson relics, up the steps, in the raised portion at the end of the hall—like a stage. His white waistcoat; with a stain, from collar downward, corresponding with bullet hole in coat. His faded stars—so splendid in their dying fire upon the empty breast.

Then out again—in the bright sunlight—beneath the blackened cornices, by the weather-soiled columns, and, beyond all, the low trench of the river—brown-sailed barges and vast steamers, rusty red, gliding slowly by and venting melancholy hoots.

Only a glance at the Museum—for papa was showing signs of weariness—full of models of ships, and a peep into the room containing the remains of the Franklin expedition—dreadful docketed trifles of that tragedy, making the cold breath of the deadly ice-wind chill and numb one's heart while one sadly looked.

'That is a form of curiosity which has cost the world very dear,' said papa, doubtless unwilling to betray his emotion. 'And what the dickens they could do with it, if they found the

Pole and brought it home with them to-morrow, I for one have never understood. Mrs. Maitland would know of course.'

Vivien had especially admired the inner guardians of the place —in their curious flat hats, long dark coats and brass buttons, so polite to all the world, as anxious as Miss Bauermann to instruct and make clear—only insisting, like cautious old fighting men, on disarming you—no umbrellas or sticks to be retained on any pretence whatever. To one of these dignified guides, who had been of the greatest aid and comfort throughout their tour of inspection, papa bade good-bye with much urbanity. Then, as an afterthought, he sent Vi back to make a present. Vi shyly presented the two pennies with a grateful smile, and with a smile and a fine salute the old fellow pocketed them.

'That gentleman your father, miss? Tell him I was overcome like by his generosity. Good-day, miss, and God bless you and watch over you, my little lady'; and the old chap stood smiling and saluting till she was gone.

Vivien most faithfully reported the message and quaint benediction, and Colonel Shelton frowned, hunched his thin shoulders, and then laughed as though much diverted.

He ordered luncheon at the waterside hotel, and there left Vivien while he went about his business. 'I might take you with me,' he said doubtfully. 'It is only to pay a visit—to certain connections of ours. But on the whole, I think you will be better here. You might be in the way.'

It was an engaging view out of the wide windows of this grand coffee-room — a little iron-railed garden with sooty laurestines in tubs; coloured lamp glasses hanging on wires all around and about it; a gigantic crane close by, busy with mysterious building operations; the river, opening wider and fairer below, but with ugly mud-banks which a slimy silent wave covered and exposed again when one of the steamboats passed.

But for slight pangs of hunger the time would have flown until papa was back again rubbing his hands, laughing gaily, and calling for the first course of their meal.

It was a delightful repast. Aided by the experience of bygone days, she realised in a moment that the visit had been a success. Papa had prospered on his errand, and was now papa at his best and brightest. Cheered by his food and wine, he gossiped: making mock and making merry in his old way, not waiting for your answer if you were slow to give it, not troubling if you did not understand, not seeming sometimes to care to make himself understandable. Enigmatical, stimulating, entrancing, mysterious enchanter of a papa!

Vi did not attempt to shine in the conversation, but sat back in her chair, contented, enraptured to sit thus honoured, picking up such crumbs of the intellectual feast as might be to her possible.

'Are you superstitious, Vi? Mind spilling salt and that sort of thing? Haven't you ever felt a strong disinclination to learn your lessons on a Friday? I *hate* going under ladders. It makes me shiver—especially if there's a beggar with a paint pot up aloft. But a superstitious old friend of mine—an Irishman—got run over by a cab in going off the pavement to avoid one—and was killed instantaneously. Never remembered till days afterwards that he had sat down thirteen to dinner the night before. Oh very sad indeed. Well you and I have been under a lot of ladders this morning—on those bridges—but I crossed my thumbs and whispered bad luck to solicitors. Perhaps that broke the spell—'

This was the way in which papa ran on, now grave now gay.

'If you ever marry a duke, Vi, the first thing you make him do is to change his solicitors.—Be quite sure they are robbing him. And the *next* thing, of course, to make his will—providing for his blushing duchess and not forgetting a little somethink for her poor old father. . . . *My* solicitors—Clifford, Atkinson and George—famous firm, eminently respectable, Lincoln's Inn Fields—are at the top of the tree, and if they can put a client up a tree also they like to do it. But they never more solicit for me. I de- and re-nounce them—scoundrels! They have been blackening my fair fame down here.—It was time I came.—But this is all Greek to you—or Chaldean! Perhaps you are a dab at Greek. Let us talk Greek—you shall begin. I am all attention.'

Papa's pallid face had flushed with anger, or so it seemed, while he spoke of his legal advisers: as though stung by the memory of old and recent wrongs.

'Vivien! It's a pretty name. *I* gave it you, and took more trouble than if I had been choosing a name for myself. Only think—I could have called you Mary Ann if I had liked—always remember that. A nice name is a good start in life—I wonder if you will ever have Vivien's power. . . . Never read *The Idylls of the King*? No. I don't suppose you have—it is not such good poetry as *We are Seven*. Ah, you know *that* —I thought you would—but there is more knowledge of the world in it. Well, Vivien was the sort of fascinating young party who could beguile a booking-office clerk into giving her a railway ticket on credit if she tried. With elderly gentlemen I

may say she proved almost irresistible. I wonder if you will have some of Vivien's power,' and he sat looking at her, critically and dispassionately, with half-closed eyes. 'I wonder. . . . This is a queer world of ours, Vi.'

Then, as Vi always remembered, when the waiters had cleared the table and brought coffee and cognac, papa, while he puffed at his cigarette, told his little daughter the story—or *his* story —of the creation and growth of the world.

'After the six days and all that, you know—after the flood, in point of fact, when it all had to be done over again—when only old Noah and his circus was left of the first lot, and they were all together in a corner keeping themselves to themselves —this is about what happened—'

Vivien listened with keenest attention, really understanding the main thread of papa's review, if not his embroidered digressions, and was in truth at times horror-struck by the gloomy conclusions to which he seemed to lead one. Always from the beginning of things a merciless, horrible struggle! Horrid rust on rock and stone pushing and smothering the rust about it, till it turned into ugly moss or lichen, and was at last alive.—Ooze and slime of rivers and estuaries struggling upward and onward into an abominable jelly-fish sort of living ignominy—which would have made bathing disgusting had there been anybody to bathe. And thus upward and onward until the world's inhabitants were fairly alive and remorselessly fighting for self-preservation.—Tearing and rending—each for himself, without pity, without regret—in the unceasing struggle to rise in the situation in which chance had placed one, to get the better of one's neighbours, and obtain rather more than one's share. . . .

'That is how we and the birds and beasts and fishes have made ourselves what we are, Vi. This is called the theory of evolution—now, I may add, very generally accepted. Yet you hear people wondering at the selfishness of human nature. How the dickens could we be anything but selfish?

'You will live to hear your father spoken of as selfish. I know it. I make no pretence. I *am* selfish. And you must be selfish too, my poor child. You must fight for your own hand. You mustn't expect others to be always fighting for you. They could not fight so well as you for *you* if they tried, and you mustn't count on their even trying. . . . Your poor old parent can barely keep his own end up in the world's hard game. You must learn not to lean too heavily on him.

'Poor little Vi—I wish for your sake that I was something in the City—a pillar of trade, like Burnett your uncle—though I have my doubts as to the stability of that particular pillar—

instead of being a broken-down old soldier. You come of a fighting race, Vi.

'Never forget that you are my daughter—the only child of Colonel Richard Shelton—and the equal of any woman in the three kingdoms. Meet pride with pride—as I have always done. Carry your head high, and let no one patronise, pity, or slight you . . . and, and look here, dear, as a last resource in any time of doubt or trouble—if called upon to prove you are my daughter—I am going to give you some of my visiting cards—produce one of these. I will give you half a dozen, and mind, you are to guard and treasure them—to be used only in a strong emergency.—There they are—I will give you some more,' and he counted the cards on the table as he slipped them out of his golden case.—'Ten, two more. Twelve, and one for luck.—See—a good name and a good club—"I play my father's card. Can you beat it?" That is what you will say—'

Colonel Shelton's hand had trembled while he counted out the little bits of pasteboard, adding to the small pile as though carried away by a paroxysm of generous emotion; but now his voice grew firm again, and there came twinkling and trembling to his clouded eyes that sunken light, the beacon or signal lamp of the paternal sense of humour.

'Yes—my dear. You may consider them as cards to play in the game of life—trump-cards. Yes, trumps. Only to be used in extreme cases. I wonder if you are already enough of a little woman to understand your sex's theory of handling trumps—to guard them jealously, hold them back to the very last—in a word, to *bottle* them. . . . That's right. Put them carefully away dear.'

And indeed Vi was bestowing them in her pocket—wrapped up tight in an envelope with one of papa's letters—as if she thoroughly understood.

'And now,' said papa, 'let us endeavour to find that railway station which I believe is not the least interesting building in Greenwich.'

In the train, Colonel Shelton was very silent: a prey to growing restlessness, quite unable to enjoy his evening newspaper. The train was stopping at all stations and dawdling between them—checked by signals, and whistling dolefully while happier expresses dashed by. Colonel Shelton glanced repeatedly at his watch. Nearly a quarter to five. He ought to have arrived at his club at least ten minutes ago.—And he would be compelled to take the child home, first. Even when they arrived

he would not be free. But once at Charing Cross, he would have nothing to do with these maddening trains. He would hail a cab—picking a good horse—take her home to Chelsea, drop her, and dash on again to Pall Mall. He might, of course, drop himself in Pall Mall and let her drive on alone! He might certainly do that.

But by the time the train dragged itself to a standstill beneath the dusky vault of Cannon Street Station, the diurnal fever had reached so high a point, that Colonel Shelton found himself totally unable to face the slow torture of the river again, the long loop on that odious Surrey shore, and once more the river ere Charing Cross could be reached. He hurried his daughter out into the noisy street; gave her money; issued abrupt directions as to how safely and securely she should find the adjacent underground railway, and, leaping into a hansom cab, with an agitated wave of the arm, left her.

As men went up the shallow steps of the wide club-staircase they seemed to change. Wrinkles made by domestic care, lines drawn by parental worry, wiped themselves out, leaving calm serenity and shining peace. At the door of this strange temple of daily delight men dropped dull care: in the hall they hung up their troubles with their hats. Easy, genial, smiling, with head more erect and shoulders drawn further back, Colonel Shelton passed upward—absolutely a changed, a rejuvenated, a glorified, man. A member besought him, as a favour, to give his company at dinner, and Colonel Shelton graciously consented. This other member was a valued friend of the very great—trustee, adviser, guardian, what not, in an august family.

'I've got young Helensburgh on my hands and I want you to help me amuse the young beggar.'

And Colonel Shelton amused. He charmed this little lord on his way from Eton to a northern castle in charge of one of the trustees. Laughing, chaffing, gay and debonair, he laid himself out to please the haughty nobleman of fourteen, heir to vast estates and splendid houses in half a dozen counties—treating him with no more deference than is justly due to a little prince who has not yet come into his kingdom: never forgetting the present child when thinking of the future king. He prophesied, in a facetious manner, what is generally termed a good time for this budding sultan: plainly indicating that empire over the fair sex would in the natural order of events be his;—that he would only have to throw his handkerchief and it would be picked up by the submissive beauty—though the handker-

chief had been thrown in fun, though it was not his real handkerchief, the wonderful spun-silk that can be drawn through an opening as small as a wedding ring, but merely a tricky makeshift of a handkerchief without a coronet in the corner.

Smiling and nodding, sparkling and effervescing like the yellow wine in his glass, for the second time that day Colonel Shelton gave a story—*his* story—of the world. But at dinner, the gloomy mists of the luncheon hour were dissipated: the theory of evolution was forgotten or suppressed. After the six days it now seemed—as humorously conveyed by the smiling narrator—that the seventh day was devoted to rest and admiration of the fair garden which had been laid out and set humming and throbbing with interesting and amiable inhabitants, saving only that on that day—more by way of relaxation than toil—some young earls were created to be lords and masters over all.

V

'YES I thought you'd like Greenwich'—Mrs. Page had said last night—'when he told me, before you came, as how he was a-going to take you there I knew you'd enjy it. It's a rare place for an out. And I shouldn't wonder if he hadn't planned another surprise for you to-morrow.'

Vi was deep in thought. Here it was again—that mystery of free will and predestination so often discussed at Southbourne—but suddenly assuming concrete form and bringing more light to the troubled thinker than all Mrs. Maitland's explanatory argument. She had selected Greenwich herself. The choice had lain with her, and yet *he* had known what her choice would be. Most wonderful!

'Another surprise'—she had said after a long silence—'Please tell me, will you?'

'No, no,' Mrs. Page had replied archly. 'That would be telling indeed.'

This morning Vi had breakfasted alone and then gone for a stroll to amuse herself until Colonel Shelton should have begun the day.

He was standing in front of the window, when, on her return, she came into the room. He was comporting himself in rather an odd fashion—shuffling his feet, bowing again and again, laying his hand upon his breast, kissing the tips of his fingers and waving this strange salute across the empty road to the apparently blank face of the house opposite. There was something at once sinister and foolish in these antics—like the clumsy amatory dance of a very wicked old bird of weak and moulted plumage—something to cause pain and regret to a child although unable to understand why.

He turned to greet his daughter in an angry and yet a confused manner.

'Oh there you are. I wondered where the dickens you had got to.'

By the side of his breakfast-cup and his *Morning Post* lay his well-worn, well-read Peerage, open at the letter H; and very soon, while Mrs. Page was laying out the metal-covered

dishes, he had recovered his composure sufficiently to mention to his daughter in a light and easy tone that he had dined last night with the Earl of Helensburgh, and was now refreshing his memory as to the least well-known of his many famous seats. Naturally, he would not at the club have given the style of a noble friend in so full a manner, but when addressing children—and landladies—it is as well to be explicit. He did not, on this occasion, add that Lord Helensburgh was a schoolboy of fourteen.

'Lor' now,' said Mrs. Page, in awe and admiration, 'and was the Earl of Eaglesham also of the party, sir?'

'No,' said Colonel Shelton, affably, 'he was not present.'

Immediately after finishing his breakfast, and while seeking a match to light his first cigarette of the morning, papa was kind enough to disclose the nature of his second surprise. It was this. Vivien was to go upstairs, pack her trunk, and prepare to depart on a visit to her aunt, Mrs. Rogers at Streatham.

'You will have a livelier time there than is possible here, the colonel considerately explained, 'and, to be quite frank, I am, at the moment, so driven for time—by business affairs—that—that, well, it will be a relief to me to know that you are enjoying yourself with Emily.'

'But does she expect me?' Vivien asked.

'She does, my dear. A very proper question! I telegraphed to her, before you were up, to say you were coming and what train she was to meet you by.'

So a cab was called; the big box was brought down; and Vivien was given a half-sovereign and ten shillings in silver, to carry her to Mrs. Rogers and thence, at the termination of her visit, onward to Southbourne. With a compliment on being so well able to take care of herself (as she had proved last night), and the expression of his complete confidence in her discretion, and capability of conducting this little trip wisely and well, papa kissed her, wished her bon voyage, and bade her adieu.

Vivien made no mistakes; showed herself well worthy of the trust reposed in her; and in due course arrived at the correct station to find her aunt waiting for her with a neat little brougham and a large grey horse. Mrs. Rogers, fat and red of face, and elderly, was to Vivien as a total stranger who bore no resemblance to memory's vague picture of the old-time visitor in Bloomsbury. Dimly Vivien recalled the impression that of the two tall aunts this was the harder and less unbending, and there was a sharpness and stern decision in her manner of

reception which confirmed the accuracy of the early judgment. Vivien had wished that she was bound for Mrs. Burnett's well-remembered mansion, rather than Mrs. Rogers's unknown dwelling, and she wished it more than ever now.

'That box must be delivered by the Company,' said Mrs. Rogers authoritatively, 'I certainly cannot take it on the carriage.'

'Is it a long way to where you live, aunt?' Vivien inquired when the grey horse had trotted off with them.

'I am not taking you to where I live, but to your Aunt Kate, to Sydenham. Three miles. Not more. There has been a mistake. A telegram miscarried, very likely. Your father is the most careless and unbusinesslike of living men. My husband and I know that only too well.'

So it seemed that Vivien's wish was, after all, to be realised.

The house of the Burnetts had undergone that sad transformation which befalls most things known in early youth and seen again after years. The stately stone mansion had shrunk into a dingy stuccoed insignificance; the entrance and the round drive were ludicrously small, so that it seemed foolhardy for the coachman and the grey to attempt them; a mean little excrescence on one side of the house alone marked the position of the vast, mysterious billiard-room; the noble hall door was narrow, low, and shamefully in need of paint. What had seemed a well-maintained palace, fit abode for a merchant prince, had sunk into a poor, pretentiously-devised, ill-built, unkempt suburban villa.

Mrs. Burnett seemed by no means prepared for her visitors. With a surprised air and ruffled manner, she bade Vivien remain in the drawing-room while she had a few words with her sister in the library.

'Emily, you ought to be ashamed of yourself,' said Mrs. Burnett in the hall. The loud angry tone carried each bitter word through the drawing-room door. 'Foisting her upon me at such a time. Anything more underhand I never—'

Then the library door closed with a bang, and Vivien heard nothing further. She walked across to the big French windows and stood looking at the garden, and beyond it, over miles of red roofs, to green fields and the low hill behind which the glass towers of the Crystal Palace glittered bluely and coldly in the weak spring sunlight.

Mrs. Rogers at last drove away from the house in a whirlwind of rage—or perhaps simulated fury—having squarely stood her ground, and successfully carried out the operation on which she was engaged.

'And I never want to see her face again,' cried Mrs. Burnett, flinging herself down in one of her velvet chairs before the fireless grate. 'Though she is my own sister. God forgive me. No more heart than those tiles. Oh, Vivien, oh, my dear, I am a very unhappy woman,' and Mrs. Burnett burst into tears.

But it was cold work sobbing and rocking oneself in this large fireless saloon, so, in the midst of her distress, she proposed an adjournment to the dining-room, where coals burned cheerfully.

Here, after nibbling a biscuit and drinking a couple of glasses of sherry—a refreshment which she regretted that her niece would not share—the poor lady dried her tears, and disclosed the causes of her trouble.

Vivien had come to a house of ruin. In the petty state ruled over by the merchant princes of the Burnett dynasty things had been going wrong for years.

'Nothing can save him. The crash may come at any minute. It's for that I've sent them all away—poor dears. They're in lodgings at Southsea with Miss Chudleigh the governess. I forget if she was here when you came that Christmas. Oh what will become of them? They will have to go out into the world and earn their living—my dear girls will. And my Lawrence—you remember your cousin Lawrence—will never go into the Army as he'd set his heart on. . . .

'You are old enough to understand all I tell you and to sympathise—aren't you, dear? You've read of such things in your story-books—haven't you? The kind father coming back to his fine, rich, well-found home—for I do call it a fine house,' and Mrs. Burnett looked round with tearful pride—'for people in our position, and God knows I never longed for more but prayed on my knees to keep it—coming home I say to tell his wife and children they are—beggars. Well, you see it acted under your eyes now. That's what's fallen on your miserable aunt.

'Only it's come to me more gradual than in the books. I've seen it coming. I've felt it coming—I've done all I could—put down my carriage—after eighteen years, Vi—reduced my establishment, dropping to three in this great house where seven, yes and sometimes eight have been kept ever since my marriage day—'

Vivien remembered the army of beribboned maids.

'And he might have been saved. There was hope at first—if a hand or two had been stretched out, he could have kept his head above water. But not one. Not one, Vi. Not even

his wife's only sister's husband. It wasn't till then that he despaired—since then he hasn't faced it as he ought. He has looked for consolation where he ought never to have sought it. *Here*,' said Mrs. Burnett with a meaning glance, laying her hand on the sherry decanter and replenishing her glass with a sad slow action of the arm.

'That's wrong and cowardly, Vivien—though I say it. But it's not the worst thing which a man can do, and a good wife—as God knows I've been to him—can make allowances for *that*. But what is killing me is the consolation he has sought *outside* this house. You're too young to understand that—I know. But this much I can say; and have, to my own children:—Their father has not been as faithful a husband to me—these last dark years especially—as I have wife to him—' and Mrs. Burnett wept again.

'When I humbled myself to Emily—she is younger than I am—going on my knees to beg aid—not money, but the support which Rogers could give—for he has prospered where Burnett has gone down; and his name, without putting his hand to paper, might have stemmed the tide—she flung that in my face—Burnett's infidelity—to me, her own only sister. Not content to refuse, but deals me that stab: the cruellest cut one woman can give another.

'And now you have some inkling of your Aunt Emily and can see what you may expect from her. Knowing our situation only too well—and never been near me for months—she comes to plant you in the midst of my troubles, rather than face the little inconvenience you might have caused her because in the thick of her spring-cleaning. Rather than have a bed put up in the bathroom—anywhere, if in truth all her rooms were dismantled as she declares, she turns you from her door and thrusts you on me, her ruined sister.'

Vivien assured her sorrowful, but still loving, aunt that she now thoroughly understood; and asked that a cab might be fetched to take her back to the railway station, whence she would proceed by the next train to Croyden, and thence again to Southbourne. If she failed to find her box still at the station, it could be sent after her.

'Oh don't go away like that dear—don't leave me—not to-day—not till to-morrow,' said Mrs. Burnett. 'It's wretched here I know, but stay with me till to-morrow. You console and comfort me by having some one to tell my troubles to. It's done me more good than you could understand to have my cry out and talk it all over with some one who can sympathise. Mallock is a good creature—you remember Mallock—she was

in the nursery—but it's not the same with her. She is not one of the family, and I have to keep things back. My loneliness is dreadful. Do stay over the night. Ten to one your uncle won't come back. Night after night he stays away, and if he does come home you needn't be in his way.'

So Vivien kissed the tear-stained, flabby face of her poor Aunt Kate, and promised to make it a one-night visit as urged.

It was a long, sad day—during which Mrs. Burnett seemed to seek support or stimulant, if not consolation, both at and between meals from the big mahogany sideboard in the dining-room. She took her niece all over the house, into all the empty rooms, pointing out their beauties and their uses, prattling the while of the joys which she was now compelled to lose, and gradually passing in review the whole of her married life.

'To drive about in your own carriage year after year, paying the tradesmen's books to the hour—only *pretending* to think them heavy; full well knowing that they were light compared with what you could afford—Respected by all, envied, no doubt, by many—knowing that in comfort, if not in luxury, you and your dear ones were as well lodged and found and done for as a duchess and her little lords and ladies could be—and then to be cast on the world at a time of life when you've come to *need* comfort and ease, and have lost the power of fighting your way all over again—naked and penniless—For that's what we shall be—*are*, if the truth was known. There's not a nicknack, not a chair, a spoon, a fork, in all this fine house which is ours any longer. All, the creditors'! I say it to you, and yet as I speak I do not realise it. But it is so. This thimbleful of brandy which I now pour out by right belongs to *them*.'

'But these things are mine—my very own which no one has a claim on—except perhaps Mallock,' said the poor soul, on her knees before her open wardrobe—late in the afternoon.

Vivien's box had arrived, and Mallock, the maid, had been sent upon an errand by her mistress.

'I wanted to get her out of the way, because I wish to give you a little present, dear—Heaven knows not much: just one or two odd things which may be useful to you—But *she* mustn't know. You must put them away and lock your trunk before she comes back—'

Vivien protested that she was grateful for the kind thought, but indeed needed and could accept nothing from an aunt in such dire tribulation.

'See here, dear,' said Mrs. Burnett, ignoring Vivien's resistance. 'This black silk—ah me! I recollect as though it was yesterday the first time I wore it—a grand ladies' night at the

Basket Weavers'—Burnett's company you know. They showed me how it would stand alone—so rich and strong. Keep it dear till you're full grown and then get it made up again however you may fancy. And this—this amber—As good as new—isn't it?'

With hurrying, agitated hands, she heaped upon the floor the two dresses, some stockings, richly trimmed petticoats, a lace scarf or two: letting the soft, clinging lace glide slowly through her fingers and fall rustling with the sound of a faint sigh, feeling perhaps, poor woman, that these were the last tokens of her prosperity slipping away from her.

'You are not robbing my chicks. They are well provided with finery—more than they are likely to be able to use. Take them all and put them away. Your aunt's last present. They would go to Mallock if not you—and I'd sooner one of the family had them. There, let's waste no time.'

She stood over the old unwieldy box while her niece removed all the layers of puffed out newspapers and packed up her present; and, glancing down, observed some odds and ends at the bottom,—a worn and tattered leather writing-case, an oval photograph frame, and a faded red morocco church-service, with brass cross and corners—which she quickly understood to be treasured relics of the late Mrs. Shelton.

'Your mother's—those things? So I thought. Always keep them dear. She was a good woman. A patient gentle creature and sorely tried if ever there was one—' and Mrs. Burnett sat down and shed a few more tears.

'Oh Vi—what men can make us poor women suffer may you never know. From my heart I pray that you may be happy in your married life—when your time comes.

'I've not done what I might have done for you, when it was in my power. I see that now—when all the power is gone. I might have had you here, made you like one of my own, and *ought*. I did try, dear, suggesting once or twice that I should ask you, but Burnett set his face against it—He always had a very poor opinion of your father and dreaded the connection—and if the truth must out—I did too—But he *is* your father, so I won't say anything against him to you.'

'No don't—please, don't—dear Aunt Kate,' said Vivien huskily.

'Quick—Turn the key. *Mallock!*' cried Mrs. Burnett, rising in haste. 'I heard her voice downstairs. Let's go down. If she caught us here, she'd put two and two together and guess what I'd been doing.'

Mrs. Burnett would on this occasion have lost, had she laid

those odds which she mentioned; for very late that night her husband returned. Vivien, aroused by the noise he made, heard the stumbling feet of the ruined master of the house as he staggered upstairs to bed.

She went away next morning without having seen her host. She had written, over night, to advise Mrs. Maitland of her return.

'You will be surprised to see me home so soon,' she had said, 'but I hope you will not mind. Papa took me for a treat on a steamer and I caught a slight cold in the head. My aunt is in great trouble. I shall be back quite early.'

VI

'LAMB' was the fashionable word all through the term in which Vivien was confirmed. The bishop who laid his hands on her and other children was unhesitatingly pronounced to be a great lamb. Vivien, however, felt that the word should not have been used in this connection. A fervour of religion possessed her; the glory and mystery of the sacramental rites filled all her thoughts; and the curate of St. Saviour's, gratified by so much enthusiasm, presented her with a little Book of Meditations.

'There,' she said to the girls. 'Read that and you'll feel as—'

But the girls interrupted her at once.

'Why should he give it *you*? He never gave anything to us. I call it rather mean of him—and you must have made up to him like one o'clock. You're deeper than you seem Vivien.'

She turned from them in disgust. She was disgusted by their shallow temperaments. Nothing could make a lasting impression. They had sobbed—some of them—at the altar rails on Easter morn; and now, after a month, it was as though all had been written in water. Nothing of grace was left to them: they were as they had ever been—schoolgirls.

'And let's hope,' said Miss Bartley, the new, unsympathetic governess, 'it won't prove a flash in the pan with you too.'

Flash in the pan? Vivien hated the words. They haunted her. Even on her knees: they made her blood boil with resentment, as she prayed in the middle of the night. Why had Miss Bartley said such a wickedly cruel unjust thing? And she would hop out of bed and get to work again: and the more she shivered in her thin night-gown, the more the hard boards hurt her knees, the better pleased was Vivien. Sometimes she really felt that she had soared upward—by an infinitesimal flight when considered in relation to the journey before her, but still sufficient, quite sufficient, to leave Miss Bartley out of sight. 'Is that a flash in the pan?' some inner voice seemed to ask as she crept back to bed; 'Or this?' as she glided into St. Saviour's Church in good time for the six A.M. celebration.

Time at Arundel House, though nothing might be done with it, went so fast that one could not count the months and years. When was it that Vivien, tidying a drawer, soiled her fingers with the thick layer of dust on the Book of Meditations? When was the Sunday morning that, sleeping late, she lost her breakfast, and received public reproof for missing the start of the crocodile for the eleven o'clock service? Certainly the time came when she was grateful to unsympathetic Miss Bartley for never saying 'I told you so.'

Perhaps the end of her religious fit synchronised with the beginning of her great horror of her own intolerable ugliness. Inexplicably, the horror of it burst upon her. She was tall and ungainly, she told herself, with a miserable wisp of uninteresting hair. As she thought about it, she felt that all eyes, male or female, were upon her; that all must see what she herself now saw. She could read their thoughts; she could hear their unspoken words. 'There goes the ugly girl from Arundel House! Oh why does Mrs. Maitland bring that ugly girl to divine service? She is so ugly that when I look her way I sing out of tune.'

Marian had gone, and there was no one to comfort her. Thus Vivien suffered without comfort. She believed this was something beyond the efficacy of prayer. But still she prayed in thought. 'Oh take away this horror from me. I ask it in humbleness, not in vanity. Give to your chosen beauty. Deny to me the incomparable gracefulness of Ethel Turner, but take away from me this horror of ugliness such as in the world has never been before. Give me at least a sufficiency of hair.'

At last, she told something of her trouble to Miss Bauermann. The good Fräulein had long since returned to her thoughtful, strenuous fatherland: but now she was back again to oblige Mrs. Maitland by filling a gap for one summer term only.

'All that what you have imagined,' said Miss Bauermann stoutly, 'is illusion, chimera, nonsense.'

Vivien in her elation made Miss Bauermann say it again. Chimera. Moonshine! It was rapture to believe; and for fifty yards, as they walked side by side, the horror was gone.

'I myself, as a child, have suffered in precisely the same way,' continued Miss Bauermann. 'Joost all the silly fears which you have felt. Yet I have grown up to be as well as another in aspect.'

Despair! Then it is true, after all. No chimera, but fact; and the horror descends again.

'Such fancies in the mind,' said Miss Bauermann, chatting cosily, 'are like wind in an empty box, blowing. Some solid

packing you should put. Scienz! Scienz, Vi, you are more than old enough to put with Logic added; and Speculation also; so that you are careful it has its broad base on those other two. Have you read yet your Darwin, your Huxley, your Carpenter, your Spencer, and your Mill, Smith, Carlyle?'

And she reeled off a list for holiday reading.

'No? Not read? Oh you English girls! Then do so Vi. Think, think and learn of the wonders which are *outside* you, and the wonders inside you of which now you are ever thinking shall draw in and grow smaller and smaller to what in truth they are—joost nothing at all.'

It was not flattering, but it was somehow most comforting.

As a wonder outside oneself, an antidote to introspection for the use of all the school, the astounding news which Miss Bauermann soon permitted herself to publish must have proved very valuable. Fräulein was going to be married. At first the girls could give no credence to the wildly improbable rumour; but at last they were forced to admit its truth. There was *his* portrait: a stout Teuton in pince-nez and in uniform, with his face most horribly slashed and seamed.

'Oh,' cried one young lady, 'it is like the Armenian atrocities at Madame Tussaud's!'

'Those are the stigmata of his courage,' said Miss Bauermann proudly.

The girls said they had no doubt of his courage.

'But how did he get them? In war?'

'In play. Joost in play. Komm! You have looked enough at my brave soldier-lover.'

Obediently following the Bauermann advice—as a duty to the departed—Vivien gave herself a short sharp course of heavy reading. She read the *Origin of Species*, and, without always knowing whether the author was speaking of a beetle or a geological formation, she enjoyed the marvellous intricate argument as though it had been the plot of a novel. What a lamb was Mr. Darwin himself—what a patient, ingenious lamb to have deduced order from chaos! She was convinced at once. But the sadness of it. Nature's cruel laws, the frightful unceasing carnage—so many to be destroyed: so few to be saved. It is worse—far worse—than the gloomy world-survey of papa at Greenwich.

She read her Darwin, her Huxley, her Spencer and her Carlyle and her Adam Smith, but her Mill was one too many for her. She was desperately in earnest.

'I cannot say that I quite like such subjects for girls,' said

Mrs. Maitland, when Vivien talked volubly and excitably of sexual selection and the extraordinary modifications produced by the judicious crossing of domestic animals.

'Why not?' cried Vi. 'There's nothing agnostic in what I am saying.'

'No, no. But I think this class of what I may term technical knowledge does not sound quite pretty on a young lady's lips.'

Vivien was almost sorry for the palpable ignorance of Mrs. Maitland, and had to deal very lightly with her in argument. She pined for the good Bauermann, whom she fancied she might now have met on equal terms.

In political economy Mrs. Maitland was weaker even than on natural history. She positively could not see the simplest, most elemental things clearly.

'Of course food is the only real measure,' said Vi. 'Take, for instance, the case of a poor peasant and his wife. They marry and there is enough for both, and a surplus. In two years they have a family of five or six children to provide for also.'

Here Mrs. Maitland was moved to mirth, and tried to pooh, pooh one.

'Oh Vi after all your Darwin and Huxley, what a child you are!'

But now the ardour of science faded, and Vivien seemed to sink into a curious dream-languor. Everything tired her; she cared for nothing at all. The ugliness of life appalled her: it was only in dreams that one could get away from the misery and wretchedness which one read of in books, which one saw on all sides unless one wilfully closed one's eyes. Poor Marian, the kindest and best of human beings, had been driven from cream-land by an unfriendly stepmother, and was now a drudge in a London shop. Mrs. Burnett, the unhappy aunt, deserted by husband, her children scattered, was most miserably alone: with only one consolation she told her niece, and then named something quite different to what her niece had anticipated—the knowledge that she was not long for this world. Near and far, trouble and anguish. Uncle Rogers, who stood aloof when Uncle Burnett cried to him from the maelstrom of financial ruin, was now himself drowning in deep waters. On all sides pain and suffering. Girls who had left a year ago, full of fun and mischief, were now lying in the grave. Suicide, incurable disease, madness, crime cutting the slender threads of joy. Morbidly brooding on all the ugly things she had ever heard of, Vivien took refuge in the dream-habit.

'Don't distress yourself,' said the dream-voices. 'This shall be your life—a dream. Forget Miss Bauermann and all her nonsense. Forget poor old Mrs. Maitland and her weak heart. *You* cannot make those damaged valves sound again. Forget them therefore. Forget. Forget.'

Then her dream-prince would come to her.

Slowly from those old days of the princekin and goose-girl, the shadowy fabric had expanded in the growing heart of the school. Changing, fitting itself to all our altered circumstances, it had grown with our growth.

Now the dream-prince was strong enough to take her in his arms and hold her close in an unutterably sweet embrace. And while he caressed and soothed her, answering her secret innermost thoughts, explaining away all troubled doubts, smoothing out and drawing straight the tangle of her immaturely foolish waking conjectures, she would look into the face of her prince, praying to remember its every trait and expression—because, through all the dream-rapture, she knew that it was a dream. He was tall and pale, and his eyes were blue; and there was sadness in the play of his lips when he smiled. That was all she ever succeeded in remembering.

Her dream and her hair alone sustained her in this her slow transit through that which Mrs. Maitland termed the silly age of girls.

O silly age of girls which Mrs. Maitland knew so well! How often had she, watching its recurrent phases, been driven almost out of her mind by her pupils' silliness! How often had she, the kindest and gentlest of her sex, been forced to wonder about the prescription of girl physicians of the barbarous past—the sharp astringent medicine of the birch! Were those barbarous practitioners so *very* much to blame after all?

Vivien's prayer had been granted. Lolling by the window in her little room, she could almost *hear* the hair growing. It was coming thick and fast. It was of a darkish brown, a dull rich colour; but over one's shoulder the reflected light in the glass showed a certain shimmer and gloss in it. To brush it was the only labour that she did not shirk.

'Vivien I shall have to send you away unless you will give up these dreadful lolling habits. I cannot,' said Mrs. Maitland, 'in conscience permit it any longer.'

'Oh send me away,' sobbed Vivien. 'Send me to drown myself in the sea. That is the best thing I can do—go out to the end of the pier and throw myself into the water.'

Then an absurd thing happened. Mrs. Maitland sobbed also.

'It is cruel of you,' sobbed poor old Maitey, 'to say such things when you know I only speak for your good. You know I would like to keep you here always. But—life is so uncertain.'

'What can I do? I have learnt everything there is to learn.'

After much consideration it was decided that Mrs. Maitland should henceforth employ Vivien as her private secretary, and thus in time convert her into a useful member of society. It is a great thing to be able to pen a good letter.

'When did you last write to your father?'

'Oh ages and ages ago.'

'Well, let this be the beginning of your task. Write to him now, and tell him what has passed between us. Give the purport of my decision. Say you acquiesce, but if he sees anything derogatory in his daughter being thus employed, or if it clashes with his own plans for your future, you will of course abandon the notion. This is not dictation. Stop scribbling, dear. Word it as nicely as you can. *Interest* him. In that lies the key to all success in composition. And to interest others in us, it is essential first to show interest in them. Now take your time about it. There is no hurry.'

No hurry! The voice of the school seemed to speak, through its mistress, the old lulling message.

It was four years since the cold spring morning on which Vivien had last seen her father. Since then he had receded into cloudland. There was always sadness in her thought of him, and of late she had not thought of him at all except in day dreams. Suppose he comes into a great fortune, rushes to claim his far-off child, to carry her away to the new and beautiful home which henceforth they are to share. It was easy to think of papa like *that*; but to write to papa, to pull him down from the dark cloud in which he had been hiding, and, after reasoned thought, to speak to him face to face! And to charm and win by what one said? It was fortunate that there was no hurry.

'Have you seen any Earls at the Club lately?' After racking her brains, day after day, that was all she could hit upon for the purpose of sympathetic interrogation as to matters of interest to papa.

Colonel Shelton on his side did not hurry either; but at last his answer came.

'By all manner of means,' he said. 'Aid our good friend as amateur secretary. I have the most implicit confidence in her judgment.'

But then came grave censure: the cloud-figure bringing down the gloomy cloud along with him.

'I was shocked by the childish tone of your letter, and must really say that it reflects little credit on a young lady approaching her nineteenth anniversary.' Even the poor little attempt to display interest had missed its mark. 'You must surely understand that one man is the same as another. . . . And that of all people in the world your father is the least susceptible to that sort of thing. As a matter of fact, since there are at the present moment on the books of the club seventy-six persons of the rank you mention, you will see the absurdity of your question.'

But Vivien, when she came to this sentence, felt distress no longer on her own account. She had followed the parental advice and read the *Book of Snobs*. Oh perish the thought that Colonel Shelton was worthy of a place in those immortal pages.

Two dream years had flown on languid, outspread wings, and now in her study Mrs. Maitland was dealing blows of hard fact: beating and buffeting Vivien with remorseless revelations. Never before, in Arundel House, had such weapons been used to drag a pupil from the lingering clutch of the silly age.

Poor old Maitey was ruined, bankrupt, utterly undone. The school was coming—had come—to an end. It was black ruin, without one ray of light. The good soul had been in difficulties for years. In the desperate hope of pulling herself straight she had invested the remnant of her little capital in South African mine shares, and now her mining company had dissolved as a mirage of the desert. A long-suffering landlord had lost patience at last: the ground was wanted for building. The house itself would disappear from the face of the earth; new villas and roads would obliterate any scar it might have left; Mrs. Maitland and her little walled world must vanish utterly, and be but as a dream-memory of her scattered pupils.

'Bad debts. Bad debts,' cried Mrs. Maitland. 'It is all summed up in that,' and she ran over the endless list of defaulters: the conscienceless parents of Emilies, Janes, and Mauds who had taken free board and schooling for their innocent daughters. Butcher, baker, tax-collector — every creditor given precedence over the schoolmistress.

A dreadful thought seized Vivien.

'My—my father—he has always paid?'

'Oh, my dear, not for years. He is the very worst.'

Mrs. Maitland would not speak of the colonel's debt now, but she would speak of everything else in the world. Like Mrs. Burnett in her hour of crisis, she brought out all her life history.

A sad youth; a bad, wickedly cruel, unfaithful husband; and then the school. That was her life. Pain, torment, carking care, sleepless anxiety, all of it; and now ruin in her old age—with no better hope than the bread of charity from an unloved hand.

'And oh, my dearest Vi, what will become of you? I do truly seem to feel it more bitterly on your account than my own.'

Then, dealing more blows of mercilessly hard fact, Mrs. Maitland talked about Colonel Shelton. He was not a good man—far from it. He could have paid, but he wouldn't. She was sure of this. She had once written to his solicitors—a very respectable firm—and they had replied that he certainly had means to support his daughter, but they had ceased to act for him.

'I will give you that letter. You may be able to make use of it, to force him to do his duty. But I fear his evasive nature. He will shuffle out of his responsibilities, with empty words. It is what he has always done to me—paid me in compliments.'

'Oh, it was dreadful to leave me here without telling me.'

And she had believed that Mrs. Maitland was a stinge.

'What will you do? What *can* you do?' cried Mrs. Maitland tearfully. 'What will you do in the hard, cruel world? There will be lions in your path. You will walk among temptations. . . . But listen, dear. I have a little money—only a few pounds—but what I have we will share. There will be ten—or a dozen pounds for each of us. Yes, yes, You must not break my heart by refusing the little I can do for you. . . . And Vi—that ermine cape of mine—you must take that. You will have a better chance of carrying it off than I ever shall now. But, oh my child, there will be lions in your path.'

At sunset Vivien went for a walk—by the promenade, along the brick extension, and upward to the headland. And as she walked it was as though with dolorous pangs the birth of reasoned-thought was coming. She was thinking as she had never thought before.

What should she do? What *could* she do? How could she ever earn enough money to pay Mrs. Maitland? How could she earn her own livelihood?

Marian would help her.

There was no one else. Poor Aunt Burnett was gone. Aunt Rogers remained, but with sorely diminished means; and if in the hour of her highest prosperity she had been found house-

cleaning, she would most assuredly be house-cleaning if one applied to her now. There was nobody else—except papa. Then for the first time—for a moment only—she brought to bear upon that thin dark figure the flare light of reasoned-thought. . . . No. Poor papa! Perhaps, after all, he could not have paid Maitey—

Papa had warned her that she was to fight for her own hand. She must not be a burden to anybody any longer. She was *grown-up*! It was strange, but as she mounted the grass slopes she felt her courage rising higher and higher. Marian would help her. Marian was self-supporting. She would be independent too. She was *grown-up*.

The sun had almost gone. The clouds, with their lower fringes of smoky red, stretched in a broad bar above the horizon. Then—as Vivien stood looking out to sea—there came a last burst of sunshine: a broad sheet of yellow light below the clouds, and suddenly quite clear, with a fierce glitter upon it, there was the far-off land. Or was it only a bank of vapour, lying solid and motionless in the sunlight, simulating the distant shore, and seeming incredibly nearer than that could possibly be?

VII

IT was the merest pretence, or make-believe, of a real shop. Above the window, there was a white board like a giant's visiting-card out of a Christmas pantomime. Mrs. Wardrop—painted in a cursive copperplate character—and the address, No. 700, Sloane Street!

In expansive moments, Mrs. Wardrop, the lady-proprietress, was fond of giving to lady customers the genesis of her triumphant enterprise. Driving down Sloane Street and lolling back in her carriage, an idle musing lady, she had observed the vacant premises between the auctioneer's and the music-seller's; and had been instantly *taken* with the situation; and rolling away towards the fashionable crowd in the Park had, as it were, carried the empty shop with her—an incongruous mental phantom amidst the polite assembly of other ladies also out for their afternoon drive. If, by way of freak—and never were ladies more freakish than at the present day—she desired to set up in business, that would be the shop for her money. Thus mused Mrs. Wardrop, bowing right and left to the ladies of her acquaintance. It was in the early days of the lady shop-keeper. All over the west end of London the amateur trades-woman was making her feeble, half frightened first appearance before the gross public of the pavements. Trivial little tea-shops, flower shops, and bonnet shops—in which gentility and commerce danced a brief breakdown and then put up the shutters—were to be seen in every street. Here and there the amateur seemed to be holding her own, to be dancing the desperate, half-hysterical jig to the music of a faint applause, and to be keeping out of the auditorium that stern critic of amateur performances—the Official Receiver. A peeress was making a game fight in Bond Street; and Mrs. Marchant and her daughters and cousins were, it was said, running their much-advertised tea-rooms into a substantial success. But, mused Mrs. Wardrop, 'you aren't likely to grow fat on cups of tea.'

Then the light had come. The blouse, the ladies' blouse, just the blouse for ladies. Only the blouse! 'And now—well now, I am Mrs. Wardrop,' the lady proprietress would modestly

say, closing her chapter of genesis, bowing out the lady customer, and turning to her lady assistants.

The serving girls doubted if their employer had ever kept a carriage; they thought she used the word 'lady' too frequently; but they admired her. They saw in Mrs. Wardrop a strong brave creature who had solved the great sex-problem, who, without male support, had fought and won, who had only one absolutely unpardonable fault. Although fast growing fabulously rich, she still appeared to think that twenty shillings a week was a handsome salary for a young lady assistant.

Instead of the usual big sheets of glass in the shop window, there were small oddly shaped divisions — diamonds and rectangles with bevelled edges and oak supports. All that one was permitted to see through the window was a high, oak-panelled screen—a wooden wall to guard the interior mystery from the prying street; a narrow strip of parquetry; a Louis Treize chair, with back and seat choicely upholstered in tapestry. Upon the tapestried seat of the chair, negligently thrown down upon it as though by accident, there lay one blouse—no more!

The shop itself was like a long, double drawing-room. This was 'the note' which Mrs. Wardrop had rigorously set herself to strike; and, in her first charge to her original assistants, she laid down certain broad principles.

'Your attitude is simply that of young ladies in your drawing-room, running over the wardrobe—for—for the lark of the thing. The customer is neither more nor less than a lady visitor. Be as nonchalant as you please, but *courteous* always—a lady is always courteous. Treat all as though on a perfect equality. There can be no discriminating among ladies. The highest in all the land can be no more than that—a lady. And that is how we will serve them here.'

But all this was long ago.

Mrs. Wardrop, old-established, in the plenitude of her great success, was sitting in the drawing-room on a Saturday in September. It was nearly two o'clock—the closing hour of the week-end. The staff had been paid their week's wage; Miss Crofts, the workwoman, had already gone; Mrs. Barrett, the cook, was raking out her fire below in the basement; Joyce, the man, had just passed down the side passage, and would be soon coming up to move the furniture out of the way for the Monday morning's sweeping; the three young ladies, Miss Inman, Miss Nicholson, and Miss Draper, were busily engaged in stuffing blouses into the lower drawers of the great oak

presses; and Mrs. Wardrop herself, in walking costume, was sitting by the big oak table considering her decision about the new girl who for the last two days had been waiting 'on appro.'

'Miss Shelton,' said Mrs. Wardrop, looking up suddenly, 'have the kindness to walk down to the door and wait by the window a minute. Miss Draper, come here.'

Marian Draper came and stood by the table, and turned her blue eyes upon her employer, while Miss Vivien Shelton retired as bidden.

'She's a fine girl,' said Mrs. Wardrop, watching the tall retreating figure with the critical air of one about to buy a horse. 'No two ways about that—I call her an uncommonly fine girl—Moves well too—But one question Miss Draper, is she stupid?'

'Oh no,' said Marian emphatically. 'She's remarkably clever.'

'Carries herself like a lady. I don't know what to say.'

'Oh say you'll engage her—Oh, you'll never regret it.'

'Miss Shelton if you please!' and Vivien came back to the table.

'Let's have another look at you, please. Turn round—Move off again—stop—Now turn—Not so much—Side face if you please. Don't mind me, Miss Shelton,' said Mrs. Wardrop, 'I'm forced to consider things. It's the law of supply and demand. I have but to hold up my little finger, and fifty, a hundred girls will come streaming in at that door—young ladies like you—I don't say as nice looking as you.'

Mrs. Wardrop had said this with a smile. Then all at once she rose to her full height—a large woman of florid colouring, and robust, valiant air, carrying the weight of her forty-five years lightly and jovially—and with her gloved hand gave the table a heavily playful blow.

'Done—done with you Miss Shelton—Weekly notice, pound a week same as Miss Draper—She'll give you the hang of things. We'll see about your fit-out, Monday morning. Begin Monday,' and she turned to go.

'Marian, how can I ever thank you for what you've done for me?'

Then the two girls walked on without speaking—struck for a moment silent by the immensity of the chatter which each had to launch at the other. With so much to say where could one begin?

At this hour of the bright September day Sloane Street wore a holiday aspect—a happy, bustling air of breaking-up time.

Every shop was being shut. In all directions, with hurrying feet on pattering heels, innumerable shop girls came pouring out like birds released from the cage, blinking for a moment in the sunlight, and then flying away on strong free wings.

'Shoppies,' said Marian, using an old school word. 'Aren't there a lot of them?'

Vivien, walking with head held high and swinging steps, watched the hurrying girls with kindly glowing eyes. They were bread-winners: independent workers, not lolling slaves —lambs! And she was independent too! She would gladly have skipped and jumped all round her Marian, at this glorious thought.

'Marian, is it quite certain that I couldn't get a room at your house? If we *could* manage it I should so love that.'

But Marian said that, dearly as she would like to share diggings with Vivien, it was not possible.

'And you will be all right here,' she added thoughtfully. 'The landlady is a thoroughly good sort. You know I lodged with her myself. I was very comfortable.'

They passed through Pont Street, by the fantastic porches of the fine red-brick houses, with a peep into the quiet sunlit oval of Lennox Gardens, beneath the big tower of the Scotch church of St. Columba; and then, in a moment, they had left all the opulence of modern architecture behind them. It was an extraordinarily quick transition from wealth to poverty. At one moment Vivien was studying a sauntering matron, all lace and finery, with a chain of pearls about her neck and emerald drops hanging from her ears, and the next moment she nearly collided with a dirty wench carrying a jug of beer from the public-house. You passed the last of the splendid red houses, and at once you were in a poor neighbourhood.

'This is Marefield Street,' said Marian. 'The police station is the greatest possible advantage as protection. Makes lodgings at this end so sought after that you really can't bargain—'

And then, almost immediately, she stopped at a house a little way down the street, on the same side as the police station.

Vivien, standing on the steps of the ugly little house, looked about her with eager interest. A brass plate on the railings—C. M. Moriarty, Robes—belonging to the dressmaker on the ground floor, whose window was decorated by a light blue silk bodice hanging between muslin curtains; across the roadway, a little further down, a public-house—the Eaglesham Arms. Eaglesham!

The room, which had been vacated only that morning, was on the second floor, at the top of the house and at the back.

Marian's provisional agreement with Mrs. Kearsley, the landlady, was soon ratified by Vivien. Seven shillings a week: nothing to be provided except breakfast—charge sixpence. 'Fire or gas would of course be paid for if used,' said Mrs. Kearsley.

'What sort of gas?' asked Vivien, looking round the bare little room, and seeing that there was no bracket or globe. 'Laughing gas?'

'I mean on the stairs and in the hall,' said Mrs. Kearsley somewhat austerely.

With regard to a latchkey, Mrs. Kearsley said, 'Cert'nly of course. But do you keep late hours, miss?'

'In the morning or at night?' asked Vivien.

'And as to entertaining friends—' said Mrs. Kearsley.

'Oh I shan't be giving parties—at least, not big parties,' and Vivien laughed.

But Mrs. Kearsley did not laugh. She hardly seemed to listen to Vivien's answers to her inquiries.

'Visitors for tea I don't mind—but for no other purpose. No one can say I am not obliging and don't wish to make people comfortable.'

'I have not said so.'

But Mrs. Kearsley was now apparently solely addressing Marian, who had turned and was looking out of the little window at the housetops.

'Well, that's all right,' said Marian over her shoulder. 'I don't think there's anything more to be said. If you are satisfied with the room, Vi—'

'Quite,' said Vi, and then there came a faintly mischievous smile to her lips. 'There is only one serious objection to your house, Mrs. Kearsley—you have a very bad landlord.'

'Meaning Mr. Parminster?' said Mrs. Kearsley doubtfully.

'No,' said Vi boldly. 'I mean Lord Eaglesham.'

'Ah, and you may truly say so,' cried Mrs. Kearsley. 'There's four between me and him, but it's *him* I blame. As you prob'ly know, miss, the leases will soon be running out, and then—'

'Yes, yes,' said Vivien in childish triumph at the success of her lucky shot, 'I know all about him. He is a dreadful old stinge!'

'He is,' said Mrs. Kearsley, 'for all he is a lord.'

And from this moment it seemed that Mrs. Kearsley treated her new lodger with the deference due to one who knew all about Lord Eaglesham.

'Oh Vi,' said Marian, when they were out in the street again,

'you *are* splendid—I mean the way you *tackled* Mrs. Kearsley. You somehow seemed to get the upper hand. But how on earth did you know about Lord Eaglesham?'

'Ha! ha!' said Vi, with laughing eyes. 'I know a greal deal I can tell you. You'll make a mistake if you treat me as a country bumpkin.'

And she brandished her parasol in the direction of the painted coat-of-arms of the bad landlord, fully displayed on a panel above the public-house door.

That evening Vivien, as the guest of Marian, enjoyed the marvellous eighteenpenny dinner at the Mentone Restaurant in the Brompton Road. With ginger beer and do-you-remembers and shall-I-ever-forgets host and guest became somewhat excited; but towards the end of the banquet, as Vivien sat turning her glass in her long fingers to make the bubbles rise and burst, wise Marian spoke rather sadly.

You could not live on a pound a week.

'Oh Marian! I must.'

It could not be done. One pound per week was the universal wage for girls in their position—that is to say, for well-educated, full-grown young ladies in the amateur shops all over London. But there were always many more girls than pounds. Mrs. Wardrop had made no idle boast. That little finger, with a very little flourish, might draw a thousand girls clamouring for the pounds. None really lived on the pounds. Only, with some means of their own, they were enabled by the pounds to rub along.

'I have help from home, and I find it a hard struggle,' said patient Marian.

Amidst the clamouring girls there were numbers who did not really want the pound at all—they were so well off already. Handsome, puffed-up, pampered, over-fed girls would, out of mischief, or greed for novelty, come sidling and simpering and rob you of your pound when you had been so fortunate as to obtain it—would drive you from your bonnets, jockey you out into the street again minus your tea-tray. With such a mob to pick and choose from, the pound-givers could change their girls as often as they pleased. So the pound was precarious as well as insufficient. Nor were the pounds even continuous. There were holidays to be taken into consideration.

'I don't want holidays. I am tired of holidays.'

Marian explained that holidays were given in slack times, and you had to take them. Then for two or three weeks your pounds ceased to flow. Illness of course was the end of every-

thing. The place of a sick girl was rarely kept open by a lady shopkeeper. Why should she be bothered with feeble, ailing girls when strong, sound girls were waiting round the corner?

'I shan't be ill. I never have been, and I don't mean to be.'

Of course, said Marian, there were lucky, or rather, highly gifted girls who earned much more than a pound a week. These were the brilliant creatures who could turn their clever hands and their keen brains to anything. They became secretaries to busy men, to clubs, and institutions. Some even wrote for the papers—the ladies' papers. And they earned—*some* of them—as much as *two* pounds a week.

As Marian spoke of this noble income, her blue eyes had that nostalgic, Devonshire creamy look that Vivien knew so well. For it seemed that if on one pound you could not live like a lady, on two pounds you could live not only like a lady, but like a very fine lady.

VIII

IN the front portion of the shop there were easy-chairs and lounges, the large oak table profusely spread with ladies' newspapers, and here and there a gilt shelf on which lay Mrs. Wardrop's latest Paris models.

The walls were decorated with striped blue paper, with mirrors, one or two choice engravings, and a crowned photograph of the Grand Duchess Nathalie of Russia in a blouse. There was a fine open hearth with turquoise blue tiles, and a white over-mantel bearing a Sèvres clock which did not go: there were palms in huge china pots; and cut-glass globes to the electric lamps, which hung on blue silk strands from the white panelled ceiling.

As you passed into the back drawing-room the aspect of the place became more businesslike. Four great oak presses occupied nearly all the wall space. A bureau when open disclosed the trade books—noble-looking volumes bound in blue Russian leather, of which one, the repository of all the trade secrets presumably, was furnished with solid brass clasps and lock and key. A telephone was installed by the bureau, and a carved oak cabinet shielded the safe in which Mrs. Wardrop put away all the money that day by day she was now making faster and faster.

'Oh beautiful,' Vivien had answered, when fair-haired Miss Nicholson asked what she thought of it all. 'Beautiful. But there ought to be a little Indian god on a pedestal—opening its mouth very wide.'

And indeed it was somewhat of a temple of humbug, and the prices *were* high. All the stock was ready-made. Mrs. Wardrop bought her blouses, slips, and shirts direct from the manufacturers—from a house in the East End, a Nottingham firm, and a firm at Lyons—and just sold them at a vast profit. Everything was marked in plain figures, but Mrs. Wardrop's figures were stupendous when considered in relation to those of the maker's invoice. A certain proportion of the stock was sent in on sale or return, and if it did not move, Mrs. Wardrop was quick to send it packing. The models, which she herself procured in Paris and paid for in hard cash, certainly did not

permit of a wide margin of gain; but by a mysterious increase, a curious self-multiplication under which they seemed to spread from table to table and drawer to drawer, Mrs. Wardrop was enabled to make a very modest supply of these chefs-d'œuvre go an extremely long way. Of the true art of dressmaking everybody—except Miss Crofts, the work-woman—was profoundly ignorant. For their lives they could not have *made* a blouse; and indeed on one occasion when from the most humble of the feminine journals, there fell out of its tissue envelope a paper pattern littering the velvet pile carpet with enigmatical curves and strips, every one was at a loss to know what garment it might figure forth, until, from what Mrs. Wardrop called 'the reading' in the newspaper, the puzzle solved itself as a *blouse*.

No one laughed more heartily at this than Mrs. Wardrop.

But in these days the blouse as an article of female wear was steadily rising to the zenith of success which it has since reached, and from which it has not yet fallen. Mrs. Wardrop, famous and fashionable, on the crest of the wave, with a strong tide behind her, could afford to laugh and be merry. It seemed that her customers could not have a sufficiency of blouses, could not glut themselves, or tire in the acquisition of these delightful stop-gaps—the connecting-links in the scheme of their wardrobes. Thus they came fingering, dallying, trifling, but finally buying at all prices from three to a hundred guineas.

Naturally Mrs. Wardrop did not publish her inherent ignorance to the outside world. She was glib enough in the jargon of her trade when dealing with a difficult customer.

She did not court or encourage trying on and alterations, because she regarded such work simply as a waste of time; but she never shrank from the ordeal. For the most part Mrs. Wardrop's young ladies could, with nonchalance and courtesy combined, dispose of blouse and customer pretty easily. They would slip the article over their own black satin shoulders and turn about in it, and soon the bargain was concluded. But there were times when a fidgety lady drove them all to despair, when Mrs. Wardrop, who had been sitting aloof, would feel compelled to intervene and carry the matter through.

'Far more satisfactory,' she would say with a gracious smile, 'to try it yourself. Miss Draper! Ring for Miss Crofts.'

Quite at the back of the shop there was an oak wall, similar to the partition in the shop front; and behind this, beneath the top-light of ground glass, Mrs. Wardrop would show herself to be truly immense—immense in that highest of all arts: the art to conceal one's ignorance of art.

'Oh I *quite* see your point,' she would say, in a slow drawl that somehow seemed to convey a stinging reproof. 'I am going to *rectify* it, if you please.'

And then the customer—perhaps some poor fat podge of fifty in an infantile blouse of lace and sky-blue—would stand docile, although trembling with suppressed excitement.

'Now Miss Crofts, pull those draw-tapes. Bring the fulness well to the centre in front and allow it to bag over a trifle Not so much. That 's better. But it pouches too much. Too pouchy altogether. Don't you agree with me, Miss Inman?'

Of course Miss Inman agreed.

'Shoulder's all wrong. Scalloped effect, yes! and epaulette-cutting—nothing better! But I don't call this cut at all. Burst those pleats, Miss Crofts. . . . Now give *me* the scissors if you please—' and then Mrs. Wardrop would rip open the whole shoulder, slashing into the material itself even, clumsily, carelessly, grandly: minding not at all what havoc she wrought, busy only on the task in hand—to make her effect, and strike terror. It would be the business of Miss Crofts later on, down in the dark basement, to repair the damage, and to sew the thing together again.

'Miss Crofts, have you grasped what I mean? Let there be no mistakes,' and Mrs. Wardrop would turn to the customer, drawling again, 'I *think* you will have no cause for complaint now'; and going back to the outer shop and catching the eye of pert Miss Nicholson, would perhaps give a good-natured wink to that young lady.

Miss Clara Nicholson was fair and plump and pretty, with a prettiness of a not uncommon but always pleasant type. She loved mirth and chatter, and was a favourite with her employer. Clara's two great weaknesses were her abject worship of the aristocracy and her horror of books and book-learning. At the mere mention of a book there came into her vivacious little face a weary, almost sullen look, which did not fade until the topic was changed. Yet she was a greedy student of certain scrappy newspapers—a green-covered paper and an orange-covered paper especially—which she carried about with her, and pored over in all leisure moments. She seemed untiring in her quest for mental food in its most compressed form, conveyed to her between the coloured wrappers, and was always eager to share a choice morsel with her shop-mates.

'Listen, Miss Shelton,' she would cry. 'Here it is again! "There are at the present moment within the postal area of London one hundred and ninety-seven thousand more marriageable females than there are males to mate them." Think of it.

Isn't it dreadful?' and she looked up, with forehead puckered, and eyes fixed in horrified thought.

'I would not think about it,' said Vivien, with a slightly contemptuous smile. 'I wouldn't allow it to prey on my mind, if I were you.'

Then Miss Inman smiled also, a sleepy, tired smile, but a smile of approval of Vivien's advice.

Miss Kate Inman was tall and dark and old—well over thirty, at any rate. Her hair was nearly black, and her brown eyes always had a weary, fatigued outlook. She was, it was said, a mystery. She gave no confidence and asked for none; and no one knew anything about her, not even where she lived. She came from the top of Sloane Street every morning, and she turned her steps in that direction of an evening. Sometimes she drove away in a hansom cab, and this, of course, aroused comment and speculation. Had she private means, or was she on some secret salary list of Mrs. Wardrop's? She was certainly worth more than any of the others, because she kept the books and acted as manager in Mrs. Wardrop's absences.

'You got this place on your hair,' said Miss Nicholson to Vivien, quite early in their acquaintance. 'It was your hair made Mrs. Wardrop take to you.'

'Was it? Well there is plenty of it,' said Vivien modestly.

'Oh I didn't mean that—to pay compliments,' said Clara frankly. 'It was just the colour. She *wanted* a brown-haired girl, don't you see. I'm fair; Miss Inman's black; you're brown; and Marian's carrots. She likes her girls to be all colours to suit all customers, don't you understand? You'll hear her call for Marian the moment a red-haired customer comes in at the door.'

And then Clara laughed her merry little Cockney laugh, while Vivien mused on the precarious chances of life: the undetected accidents, the unguessed causes, minute hidden springs and delicate inward bands and cogs that move the wheel of destiny.

'See how she dresses us,' Clara added. 'So plain, we might be lay figures. Well, that's just what she wants us for. And yet it isn't unbecoming,' and Clara studied her reflection in one of the big looking-glasses. 'We don't look bad, all said and done.'

The shop costume was composed of a close-fitting black satin blouse, with a black velvet belt, and what Mrs. Wardrop termed 'a neck finish' of coffee-tinted lace, and a black skirt of that new bell shape which had just come in. All this was provided by the proprietor, was laid by in cupboards in the basement at

night, and in no circumstances was to be used out of business hours. Mrs. Wardrop, however, expected her young ladies to provide certain matters for themselves.

She was a martinet where corsets were concerned.

'Go, my dear girl, do go for goodness' sake to Leonore across the street and do the thing in style,' Mrs. Wardrop would urge. 'It's all or nothing with stays. There's no in-betweens. She'll charge you four guineas, I grant you; but they'll last for ever. They'll do *you* justice, and you'll do *me* justice in them.'

It was good advice probably, but not always easy to act on.

She also begged each young lady to find for herself a good silk petticoat. She liked to hear what she called 'the frow-frow' of it as they walked about the shop. She was not particular as to colour, but she did like good honest Lyons silk for material.

'I know they cost money,' she would say, perhaps relenting after making her point good with regard to Madame Leonore, the famous corsetière. 'And if you can't run to what I mean, just go to Ditchingham's in Wigmore Street and ask for one of their rustling underskirts, same as they are always advertising. They're only twelve bob. They're not the real thing, and they *sound* different; but if we can't snow white, why let's snow brown.

In Vivien's case this petticoat difficulty had, with Marian's aid, been happily overcome by the sacrifice of one of those splendid dresses of Aunt Burnett's long-past prosperity. At a small cost, Mrs. Moriarty of Marefield Street converted the amber dinner-gown into what was required; and now when Vivien glided to and fro, or turned abruptly, Mrs. Wardrop was well satisfied: catching with her sharp eye a tawny flash, while her highly trained ear was soothed by the true and undoubted *frow-frow*.

Luncheon and tea were provided by the establishment and served to the young ladies downstairs, in the dark front room where Miss Crofts toiled all day, packing and addressing the cardboard boxes, or plying her sewing-machine and running the iron over seams and folds, at the table in front of the dirty window through which a pale light filtered from the iron gratings up above. The young ladies descended to this untidy den two at a time, as chance gave them opportunity rather than at fixed hours; and nothing but hunger enabled one to deal with the greasy fare supplied by Mrs. Barrett the cook. In this matter of meals they were far worse off, Miss Crofts often said, than the real shoppies in adjacent drapers' shops, who 'at any rate had their food regular and good.' No lunch was prepared on Saturdays—not so much as a sandwich; and this was

accounted illiberal on the part of their employer. It was all very well to talk about the insurance policy and the necessity for Mrs. Barrett to rake out her fire and leave all cold before she left, but that was not the real reason.

Vivien used to try to go downstairs with Marian. She found Clara Nicholson a boring table companion at first. Clara would bring her coloured newspapers and enlarge upon their merits, advising all the world to endeavour to win their prizes. A pound a week for life was the tantalising bait in one; a thousand pounds down the colossal guerdon of the other. 'Think of it! What it would mean for you or I!' Or else she unravelled the mazes of fashionable life with the aid of a modish journal.

'We've some beauties among our customers I can tell you. There's Mrs. Granby. Well I *can't* tell you what Mrs. Goff says Mrs. Granby is. You might be shocked. You see I don't know how prim you are or how prim you aren't. Here's a name I know. And here's another. Ah! Mrs. Arncliffe! She's just about as fast as they make them; and yet at the very top of the tree. Received everywhere—at Court and all. Mrs. Goff opened my eyes about *her*. Have you got a headache?

'Then there's Lady Augusta Lidstone. Her, I do admire. She is such a born swell. She rings us up on the telephone, and then comes in and turns the place upside down.—So does Mrs. Arncliffe for the matter of that.—But Lady Augusta has such a way with her. She's as tall as you and she stands looking at one as though—as though you were so much dirt.—*She's* unmarried, but they do say—'

Then, in a moment, poor Clara would be huffed.

'I am sorry I'm keeping you up. It's not my idea of good manners to yawn in one's face. If you don't like my conversation you might now and then provide some of your own.'

Poor Clara! At this period she had been written down in Vivien's mental notebook as very far from lamblike.

Vivien had shown herself quick in getting the hang of things. It was all simple enough really.

But there was a most dreadful operation which Mrs. Wardrop attempted at dull times such as these October hours when London was still empty, when the hansom cabs had put away their pretty summer hollands, but still crawled by listless and unchallenged, and when dead leaves flew along the vacant pavements. This was stock-taking. Mrs. Wardrop never really carried the thing through, although, as she said herself, without it she might be robbed hand over hand. She never

properly took stock as stock was being taken up and down the street in the real shops; but her uncompleted attempts served at once to relieve her mind from vague fear, and to bring the young ladies into close touch with the varied treasure intrusted to their care.

'So now,' cried Mrs. Wardrop, 'we're in for it. I don't like it no more than you do. Miss Inman. Your books in order? Come then, let's pluck up a spirit and get the thing through for once if we break our backs over it.'

It was a fine sentiment; and, having delivered it, she would sit down in the armchair by the table with her private memoranda under her much-ringed hands. She was the general, of course, and could not afford to break her back at the opening of the campaign.

Then the battle began. Out of the great presses, the wonderful feminine treasure came tumbling and flowing, until the whole shop seemed lost in the wonder of it. Bubbling upward from the deep lower drawers, and falling in rainbow-tinted cascades upon the white sheets which had been spread over the dusty carpet, the endless stream would begin to gush forth. Of all colours and all materials, of every conceivable and inconceivable shape, now grave and severe, now prismatically radiant and fantastically droll, in simplest flannel, in richest velvet, running the scale of silk and satin, striking marvellous colour chords in trimmings and insertions, working out subtle harmonious passages between lace and chenille, the lower-priced blouses poured over the back shop and utterly submerged it.

Never was such a frow-frow to be heard as now, or such a babel of blouse-jargon, as Miss Draper, Miss Nicholson, and Miss Shelton dragged out and carried and classified, while Miss Inman, at the bureau, becoming every moment more muddled over her books, maintained a wearisome directing recitative.

'Glacé silks, three and three-quarter dozen of each,' read Miss Inman, 'Brent and Cooper's. You'll see B. C. on the ticket-tab, Miss Shelton. I am trying to call nothing but Brent and Cooper's.'

'Yes, for heaven's sake let's do one thing at a time,' said Mrs. Wardrop, groping among her papers at the table.

'But stop,' cried Miss Inman, 'I'm wrong—all those last glacés were Thiebaud and Cie.'s.'

'Never,' cried Mrs. Wardrop. 'I never had a glacé from Lyons in my life. They may be from Nottingham. But put 'em on one side. It's Brent and Cooper's we are at. Pull the B. C.'s out wherever you see 'em.'

In sumptuous velvets and frugal cashmeres, the stock from

the East End house would begin to pile itself on tables and chairs, mounting in blouse-tendrils from the ground, like a climbing plant, until the rainbow foliage of Brent and Cooper waved above the bureau and clustered and fluttered across the top of the cheval-glass, and still Miss Inman read on, and the fabric names, in question and reply, filled the air. Viyella, Woolaline, crêpe de chine. Yes. Here are some of the crêpes —B. C.'s trying to hide themselves behind the press doors. Plaid silk, spotted silk, pongée silk: glacé silk again. Shall we ever get through these glacés? Oriental satin; satin merv! Ivory? Pink? Sky? Sapphire? Black? 'All mervs you said?' And the nets? B. C.'s specialité of spotted nets not touched yet. Not one net risen to the surface after two hours' hard work.

As you cleared the bottom drawers, and, rising from your knees, began to ascend through shallower drawers towards the upper trays, the price rose with you. The higher a blouse lived in the presses the dearer it became. When the trays began to give up their burden a softer plan of colour and a far more delicate scheme of material came into play. And as the tray-blouses, divested of their tissue shrouds, took the place of honour on all the tables and chairs—no tray-blouse was ever put upon the floor—the shop seemed to go round, to become like one of those gigantic tops which at a touch make a kaleidoscopic change of colour: spinning under your hand from creaming, frothing yellows and ochres to sudden greens, or with a flashing gradation of crimson-purple to an almost sickeningly sweet faint rose.

But all this was as child's play to the box-work. When a blouse ran into big money it lived in a box by itself: lay in a white bed with tabs of silk ribbon to tie it down on its couch. It was back-breaking work when all the boxes came down. But here was the heart of the treasure, the gems of the collection, the blouses which cost anything from twenty to a hundred guineas. Over these opened boxes the average customer could only be expected to gloat in ecstasy: as an admirer, but not as a purchaser. Mrs. Wardrop could count probable buyers on the ringed fingers of her two hands. But quite poor customers were as she said 'bucked up' by the sight of such things. They would stand and gloat in an admiration so pure as to be almost purged of personal, covetous alloy—much as a picture collector who loves to pick up small pieces by master hands can walk through one of the great Continental galleries and thrill with pleasure as he looks upon the vast canvases so immeasurably beyond his own reach—; and then with a sigh these poor ladies

would turn, and perhaps, in dreamy abstraction, soon find themselves the owners of considerably more than they had originally wished to acquire.

Indeed these box-blouses were very, very beautiful. Among them were all the delicate embroidered brocades, the hand-painted satins, of which the shimmer would fade in a single night. The iris of the dove, the glory of peacock tail and pheasant breast, the bloom of the ripe peach, the warm lustre of the pearl met and gleamed and glowed and glittered when the box lids were removed. They were irresistibly lovely—each in its widely different manner—these wickedly dear and wickedly tempting gems of the collection. Here naïve simplicity: white satin and heaven's own blue, with a fall of *malines* lace; here the *beauté du diable* of orange and spangles. Here, revers of jewelled broidery, golden thread or silver plaquing; there, a sailor collar with a border of turquoises. Barbaric bursts of colour, oriental pomp of ornament, gold and crimson lake, sequins, passementerie and appliqué work—forming a jacket which a sultan might wear on his marriage eve! And here, suddenly, entrancingly, this loose, hanging wonder which the fairies have made for us out of nothing at all, except ivory satin, real old lace and real old pearls.

Perhaps, after all, the seed-pearl blouse was the most exquisitely lovely of all the lovely blouses there. . . .

But all at once, in the deepest muddle, the wildest confusion of the stock-taking, Mrs. Wardrop's eyes became fixed, and she pointed with outstretched hand as though she had seen a ghost.

'Aren't you ever going to get rid of those four soils, Miss Inman? I am beginning to hate the sight of them.'

These four blouses, which Vivien had dredged up from an unexplored depth and had now laid on a sofa, were well-known figures in the shop history. Mrs. Wardrop herself had spilt a cup of beef-tea over them. There were days when Mrs. Wardrop required keeping up between meals, when Clara would be always running down to the kitchen to fetch nourishment; and, on one of these occasions, the catastrophe had occurred. Mrs. Wardrop had done the mischief herself and was therefore compelled to make light of it. Miss Crofts, with blotting-paper, iron, and all her cleaning art, had conjured away nearly all trace of damage. Only a faint discoloration here and there, an almost imperceptible spot or two, remained. Nevertheless, in common honesty, one was forced to class them as veritable soils and to mark them down accordingly.

'What are they marked now?' asked Mrs. Wardrop of Miss

Inman, who had left the bureau and was ruefully examining them.

'Five seven nine,' said Miss Inman. 'Four fourteen six; and four guass both the others.'

'Mark 'em down again,' said Mrs. Wardrop decisively. 'Mark 'em, four, three, two, and two. Guass of course,' and Miss Inman wrote out the new tickets.

It was a rule of the shop that round numbers should always be counted in guineas. The pound only appeared in broken figures.

'I really have come to hate the sight of them,' said Mrs. Wardrop in a voice from which all energy had apparently been sapped. 'And what's more, I don't mind owning I've had about all I want of this job. What say you, young ladies? Shall we cry a truce? . . . Miss Shelton sit down and take an easy. You've been doing more than your share all the morning.'

One afternoon, when Vivien, returning from tea, came into the back shop through the side door at the top of the stone stairs, Miss Nicholson, in a condition of extreme excitement, met her on the threshold.

'Mrs. Arncliffe playing up old Harry—in a beastly temper and as rude as can be. *But* she's brought the most perfect swell you ever saw. Go down to the window and pretend the blind's wrong and have a good look at him. I *believe* it's her cousin. Mr. Stanford—his name's always in the papers, along with her and the others.—Mrs. Goff says—'

But here Miss Nicholson was called to the front.

'I don't pretend to know what I want,' said the beautiful Mrs. Arncliffe of the fashionable papers. 'That's *your* business, Mrs. Wardrop. No. Hideous! Take it away. I wouldn't be seen dead in it.'

She was most gorgeous of raiment: a flashing brilliantly coloured dragon-fly kind of woman.

'Oh, no, no, no,' and she waved away both Miss Draper and Miss Inman with one sweeping gesture of contempt for their burdens. Miss Nicholson was no more fortunate. With a light laugh of scorn, Mrs. Arncliffe rejected her humble offering. She turned to and fro, restless, flashing, shrilly petulant; spurning the accumulated display; surrounded by the anxious faces of the proprietress and her assistants.

'You seem to have gone to sleep this autumn,' she cried fretfully. 'I was in Paris a week ago and like a fool I wouldn't look at anything, relying on you. But everything here might have come out of the Ark,' and she laughed.

Mrs. Wardrop, after biting her lip, laughed also.

'I too have been in Paris. Miss Shelton, bring some of our last Paris models. One at a time, if you please.'

So then Vivien came face to face with this famous newspaper beauty.

There was something of insolent hardness about her eyes and mouth, but when she laughed or spoke, the dragon-fly brilliance flashed out, and a restless animation made it impossible to analyse the features or fairly consider the materials from which she drew her beauty. She was certainly beautiful—as the newspapers all said—but Vivien thought, while they looked at each other across the condemned Paris blouse, that she was beautiful in a most unamiable, flaunting, insolent way.

'New girl,' Vivien heard her say; and then the word 'Maypole' and the sound of a laugh came floating to the back shop.

Backwards and forwards, to and fro, piling up and ransacking, with tray-work and box-work, as though in a mild form of stock-taking, Vivien and the others laboured without pleasing.

Mrs. Wardrop suddenly retired, and, sitting at the table, began to scrutinise a newspaper. This was one of those rare customers whose tale she could tell on her ringed fingers; and perhaps Mrs. Wardrop was smitten with sudden fear lest her own patience might give way and one of those distressing explosions of temper, which *had* now and then occurred, result in a vacant place among her fingers.

In a corner, silent, forgotten, sat the man. He was tall and dark, with dark, slowly moving, watchful eyes. As he sat patiently waiting in the corner, there came from him a subdued effulgence—the black lustre of his silk hat and of his boots, the soft slate shadows and the ebony gloom of his trousers and his coat, with a faint white flash of shirt linen, a fawn-coloured gleam and a dull glinting ray or two where the electric light fell upon his gloves and his tie-pin. Clara alone remembered his existence. On each of her journeys Clara looked into his corner and thrilled with delight from the rapid glimpse of him, as he sat darkly, splendidly sphinx-like.

'My good girl,' said Mrs. Arncliffe abruptly to Vivien. 'I have told you twice I don't want dingy colours. Take it away.'

And as Vivien retired in search of something else, the word 'stupid' floated after her.

'Claude,' cried Mrs. Arncliffe, 'don't sit gaping there. Come and help me.' Then she turned to Miss Inman. 'How disgustingly hot and stuffy you keep the place. Don't you ever have a window open? It is suffocating.' And she began to

tear off her chinchilla boa and her elaborate jacket. The tall man took the boa, and laid it across his arm. Out of some inner pocket, Mrs. Arncliffe snatched a lace handkerchief and a jewelled flacon, and then pushed the coat towards Vivien.

'Hold that,' said Mrs. Arncliffe.

But Vivien did not attempt to hold. She let the beautiful, gorgeously lined jacket fall upon the floor.

'How clumsy you are,' said Mrs. Arncliffe.

'And how rude you are,' said Vivien defiantly; and she turned her back and walked away, while the tall man stooped, picked up the coat, and, after brushing some dust from the big sleeves, laid it across his arm with the boa.

Mrs. Wardrop looked up sharply from her newspaper.

Vivien's heart was beating fast and tears were struggling to find a vent as she stood alone for a minute before the ransacked presses. What had she done to deserve such cruelty from fate? Why had this insolent woman been sent to ruin her—to insult her before the strange silent man and all her shop-mates, to call her Maypole and Stupid and Clumsy, to treat her as though she was dirt, as Clara said, to wring from her the words which must infallibly undo the effect of a month's hard work and cast her adrift again.

In a moment Mrs. Wardrop would come and dismiss her, probably demanding that she should first do penance by abject apology to the outraged customer. But as she thought of this, a dumb devil of obstinacy or pride took possession of her. Nothing on earth would make her apologise. They might turn her out with ignominy, they might do their worst, but no power in the world should make her humble her pride by a syllable of apology to that insolent, flaunting, wickedly brilliant, balefully flashing enemy.

In the front shop the tall man had been whispering in continuous expostulation; and it was the man, and not Mrs. Wardrop, who roused Vivien from her troubled thoughts.

'Oh Miss Shelton—would you mind bringing back that red one? I thought it most fascinating.'

As Vivien turned, he had come close to her. Sitting attentive in his corner he had been quick to learn her name, and he used it again, as, with a grave smile and darkly watchful eyes, he pointed to one of the Paris models.

'The fact is Miss Shelton, my cousin has a headache, and as she says she never knows what she wants. It is too bad to give you all so much trouble. But if you really don't mind, I wish you'd show her those two once more,' and he indicated another blouse.

He spoke of his cousin with that good-natured, long-suffering tone which people use when speaking of a child—a well-known and very troublesome child; and he seemed to say to Vivien by his manner: 'Do be kind and help me to get out into the fresh air again.'

So then Vivien obeyed him.

'I am very sorry. Claude says I *was* rude to you. Was I? I've got a splitting headache. You know what a headache is,' and Mrs. Arncliffe pressed her temples with her fingers. 'I should think you all had headaches here. Now do help me. Decide for me. Claude says that red is all right. I don't know. And I don't care'; and she suddenly looked at her watch—a tiny hanging ball: a little sphere of diamonds and rubies on one of the slender chains that surrounded her beautiful neck. 'Oh my dear Claude. *Do* you know what the time is?'

Then hurriedly and carelessly, more restless than ever under the thought that she ought to be somewhere else, Mrs. Arncliffe chose three very expensive blouses, and hurried away.

'A thousand thanks,' she said to Vivien, with a careless smile and nod. 'They're not what I wanted, but they'll do until I can find time to come in again.'

'I'll tell you what,' said Mrs. Wardrop confidentially to Miss Draper, 'I like that girl and I like her spirit. I consider she read Mrs. A. a very proper lesson, and Mrs. A., like a true lady, bore no malice. But if she *had*, I should have asked Miss Shelton to go outside that door. Will you tell her that, or shall I?'

IX

VIVIEN called Marefield Street the Social Ladder; and, as she told Marian, she hoped she might never be forced to stand on a lower rung of it than Mrs. Kearsley's.

At Mrs. Kearsley's you were still close to the well-to-do world. A few steps brought one to good thriving shops: a cleaner's, a furniture-dealer's, and a bright dairy—the outposts of real gentility, the farthest point to which the proud servants in all the fine red houses might be expected to extend their patronage. Beneath Mrs. Kearsley's the street dropped steadily in the social scale. The houses themselves became lower, decreasing from two stories above the ground floor to one story only. The cards in the windows, instead of announcing Apartments, specified Bed sitting-room; the brass plates with Robes were represented by wooden boards and Dressmaking; and at a greengrocer's a written paper fluttering above the dingy cabbages bore the legend: 'Bedrooms for respectable women who are out all day.' The Eaglesham Arms public-house had a saloon bar out of which came sauntering butlers and footmen, but The Enterprise was used only by the humblest classes. Through a red brick archway one could see the asphalt courtyard of Malplaquet Buildings: two big blocks facing each other. These Buildings were at any rate clean, and more or less ornate with terra-cotta lintels to doors and windows; but below them the street soon gave up all attempt to maintain a decent appearance and sank into dirt and squalor. Past a cheap printer of visiting-cards for the poor people who never pay visits, a plumber who seemed to say by the decoration of his window: 'I am a plain, matter-of-fact man, devoid of insidious pretence or mock modesty,' a tobacconist and newsagent, who also offered penny toys and sweets and fireworks, and a sweep, one came to really abject little houses with only one window on the upper floor. Past these one was confronted, at the bottom of the ladder, with frank misery, and dirt, dirt, dirt: crazy tumble-down boxes of crumbling bricks and decaying boards, sacks bulging from glassless windows, and on the roof of one of these wretched shanties, a marvellous sort of roof-garden—or hideous burlesque of the loggia and balcony of

the rich—with indescribable hutches and sheds, and a broken parapet behind which one could see most dreadful ragged women feeding chickens, or hanging clothes to blacken while they dried. At this slumlike base of Vivien's Social Ladder, Malplaquet Street—full of barrows and vans: a costermongers' fair on Saturday nights—opened out on either hand and to the right led one towards the comparative magnificence of the Brompton Road, where one left behind one this particular section of the estate of that bad landlord, my Lord of Eaglesham.

All Marefield Street—said Mrs. Kearsley—was to be pulled down when the leases fell in, and all its inhabitants would be sent flying, in a cloud of brickdust, with a rattle of falling beams, to make room for the spreading gentlefolk in their red and white mansions.

Vivien and Mrs. Kearsley had hit it off very well as Marian had prophesied. The landlady was accustomed to the ways of shop-ladies and endeavoured to make her young lodger as comfortable as might be in her little north room under the slate roof. All the rooms at this end of the street, she said, were occupied by ladies from the Sloane Street shops. The gentlemen, she explained, with their bicycles and the hardy habits of the sex, as a rule liked to live farther from their work. The custom of 'sleeping in,' either for the ladies or for the gentlemen, did not prevail in Sloane Street, where rents were terribly high and the upper parts of the houses too valuable to provide bedrooms for employés.

Thus of a morning, at a little before nine o'clock, a crowd of girls would pour out of Marefield Street and hurry away to their shops. Professional shoppies, nearly all of them, but with here and there a better-born amateur like Vivien and her friends, they would flit by in the wintry sunlight, filling the pavement with sudden girlish life, and then in a few minutes leaving it dull and dingy and empty again. They looked so pretty in the morning light—slim figures with slender ankles, silk-haired blondes, warm-cheeked brunettes, chattering and laughing by twos and threes, or silently flitting one by one beneath the shadow of the red porches and out into the sunlight again—that all along Pont Street it was as though a border of living flowers had sprung up by enchantment through the stone flags, to bloom and glow and then to vanish before one could realise the wonder of it.

This is how it appeared to strike any happy young bachelor nephew or frivolous bachelor uncle of the big red houses who, happening to be about so early, unexpectedly found himself in the midst of this daily procession. They all looked worth following. And the silly fellow would pause irresolute—like a dog in

a rabbit warren, ears cocked, head on one side, making little darts and then stopping rigid: flummuxed; not knowing which to follow; and letting all his chances slip, till the last dear little bunny is safe in its earth.

Clara Nicholson one morning pointed out such a case of embarrassment to Vivien. But, in a moment, this dog lowered his head and seemed about to dart straight at them. Then they turned and hastened down the Social Ladder; and when, slightly flushed, they looked back, they were glad to observe that the dog had changed his mind.

Clara had come to take Vivien for a walk before going to Mrs. Wardrop's. In alternate weeks the girls had early and late hours; and this week Clara and Vivien were not required at the shop until eleven o'clock.

It was impossible long to resist Clara's friendly overtures. From the first, in spite of rebuffs, Clara had sought the friendship of Vivien, and after a time she had decided to have it out with that young lady.

'It 's all very well being so high and mighty,' said Clara.

'I am not high and mighty,' said Vivien; but her conscience pricked her.

'You are to *me* always. And I think it 's very unkind when you see I 'm fond of you. If I wasn't, I wouldn't care twopence halfpenny.'

Then Clara invited Vivien to dine with her at the Mentone Restaurant. 'As my guest, I mean.' Vivien fenced with this invitation. If you were guest one day, you ought perhaps to be host another day; and this might not be soon convenient. Clara, who lived with an old mother, was presumably in very easy circumstances, although never what she herself called 'flush.' She could afford to be thus lavish: whereas others could not.

'If I ask Marian too, will you come?'

Then, unable to resist the pleasure of the little treat with Marian, Vivien said yes. It was a most enjoyable party, and, in thanking her hostess, Vivien said she did not know how she could show sufficient gratitude for the delightful entertainment.

'Well,' said Clara, 'there is *one* way you might.'

'Tell me and I'll do it,' said Vivien.

'Why,' said Clara, laughing, 'ask me to dine with you, of course.'

With an exchange of Mentone hospitalities, the friendship was duly inaugurated. It was pleasant to have Clara as an always willing companion, because Marian was so often occupied by extra tasks, or private business of her own, that one could not rely on obtaining her company. Poor Marian—so patient

and industrious, working out of shop hours at any employment she could find—was, in spite of all her industry and the allowance from home, very far from easy in her circumstances. As she said herself she found it a hard struggle to rub along.

In the course of their morning walks Clara gave Vivien a mass of information concerning life in London, and more especially in regard to the charmed circle of aristocracy and fashion.

'The real swells are different to other people,' said Clara. 'They dress different, they talk different, they think different, they *are* different. You 'll get to see it just as plainly as I do—to recognise the difference, the moment they come in at the door.'

Clara used to chatter on her favourite topic as they walked across the Fulham Road and away northward to Kensington Gardens and the Park, and Vivien would often retire to the society of her own thoughts, only keeping her young friend going by automatic interjections.

She loved this labyrinthine immensity of London, with its endlessly unrolling street-pictures. She loved to study its meanness and its grandeur: poverty and wealth rubbing shoulders so closely, a narrow short cut through a wretched side street and then lordly crescents and squares, fine houses blinking with updrawn blinds as sleepy servants roused themselves to begin their easy lolling day, alleys and courts where the inhabitants had been awake and working for hours—it was like a marvellous intricate book whose pages were turned for her by unseen hands as she walked on. She read the book without accurately understanding, but with keen interest: much as she had read her books of science and philosophy, deriving something vague and garbled, but good, from each.

'I sometimes think,' said Clara, 'that if I had millions and millions of money, I could never be quite like one of them. I could not make myself *quite* the same. You must be born to it.'

'Must you?'

As the pictures unfolded themselves in the cold wintry light, Vivien thought of the good Bauermann, and that advice about the wonders outside one which dwarf the wonders inside one. Well, London did that. It seemed to prove by its vastness how infinitely small a thing one was—an ant walking in the heap of ants. A solitary ant perhaps, for whom no other ant in all the incalculably enormous ant-heap really and truly cared. But was not this the fate of half the ants one passed? With this and other no less original reasoned thoughts, Vivien drove away the spirit of sudden sadness which lurked here and there about the wonderful town.

'I know a lord when I see him. I could not tell you how. It seems like instinct, but I'm hardly ever wrong.'

'Oh Clara, what utter nonsense you do talk!'

'It isn't nonsense, it's true.'

'By the twitching of my thumbs, something noble this way comes! Is that how you feel?'

'You may laugh, but I'll prove it to you,' said Clara confidently.

And that same morning, as they crossed Park Lane and entered the stately, silent paths of Mayfair, Clara suddenly clutched and squeezed her companion's arm, and by too excited gestures drew attention to a fine old fellow with grey hair and a big, forked beard, who was coming towards them.

'A lord,' said Clara in an impressive whisper. 'Mark my words.'

'Is he?' said Vivien, when the old fellow had passed and was at a safe distance. 'Then do go and ask him to give you a card or an envelope or something to prove it.'

'I can't do that,' said Clara, not without hesitation. 'He would think it so odd. But promise me that you'll remember him. Some day or other, we'll prove it all right.'

All along South Audley Street and through the squares and even among the shops of Bond Street, where windows were being dressed and there were beautiful hats and ball dresses and furs and tiaras to look at, Clara breathed the air with a heightened pleasure.

'It is here that the real swells live,' she said. 'The people round us are not the real thing. I don't mean to say if you look in the directory you won't see plenty of handles to their names, but they are out of it for some reason or other. They are not really in the swim, Mrs. Goff says—'

Without ever having seen this Mrs. Goff, the respected friend whose words Clara was always quoting, Vivien had taken a strong dislike to her.

'I am rather afraid your Mrs. Goff is what her enemies might call a snob.'

'I don't think you ought to say that,' said Clara, flushing indignantly. She was loyal to her friend and defended her staunchly. 'She isn't in the least snobbish, only she knows everything that goes on, and it's amusing to be taken behind the scenes as it were. She does take you behind the scenes with a vengeance too! And, besides, if you come to that, it's as bad as saying *I* am a snob. Perhaps you think I *am* one.'

Naturally Vivien apologised for her unfortunate remark.

'I am not a snob a bit,' said Clara. 'Only I love all pretty

things and fine things and grand things. Goodness knows I don't have any of them myself—and never likely to. But I can look on, without envy—like a child at a play. I love to see a pretty woman in a lovely dress in a beautiful carriage, yes and with a swe— a good-looking man with her; and I can stare and enjoy it and not want to turn her out and be in her place; and it isn't everybody who can do that,' and Clara tossed her head defiantly.

'You are a lamb,' said Vivien humbly.

'Mrs. Wardrop, who of course isn't really a lady,' continued Clara, not yet mollified—'I can see that. I'm not blind—she understands me. "That's right," she says, "Take your gape-seed, Clara. There's nothing to pay." And *you* like gape-seed too. You stare at some of the houses, as though you wanted to look through the brick walls.'

'I know I do. Don't be angry, Clara.'

'And if you think I really and truly mean all the silly things I say, you are wrong in that too. I don't stop to think. I just say it out—anything: half the time in fun and not caring to know what I do really think. Perhaps if I stopped for that, I might be more inclined to cry than to laugh, I may be common —I can't help it, if I am—I never was properly educated—but in my heart of hearts I know I am not a snob.'

But this outburst at an end, and after a further apology, Clara smiled again, and, giving Vivien's arm a little friendly squeeze, began herself to apologise.

'Don't think me bad-tempered. But you know I am fond of you. I'm sure I don't know why. And when one is fond of a person any unkind word wounds.'

Vivien squeezed the hand with her arm before it could be withdrawn, and walked on feeling very humble indeed. This frivolous cockney chatterbox—this other ant by her side in the ant-heap—was a deeper mystery than she had been able to fathom. She had been justly reproved by her shop-mate. She turned to Clara with increased fondness. Henceforth she and Clara would be real friends.

And as they struck across Oxford Street, and on again towards the Regent's Park, Clara was chattering as freely as ever, and Vivien was making the very wisest resolutions for her own guidance. She was thinking of Mr. Carlyle and his boundless Dream-Grotto: of his introspective wonder, leading by so widely divergent paths to the Bauermann goal of individual tranquillity. She thought of the masks which we all wear—the outward walls, more impenetrable than these stone faces of the Portland Place mansions, behind which we all sit hidden. What was Marian

herself behind her mask? Or Mrs. Wardrop behind hers? Or inscrutable Miss Inman behind hers? Or papa behind his marble and steel outer casing, through which, as she remembered, papa himself seemed to shine by some chink or cranny, fitfully and strangely, as a light now genial and smiling, and now scorching and lurid? She would never pretend to see through the masks again.

'Oh!' and Clara gave a cry of pleasure.

Chance had flung her such a handful of gape-seed as did not come in her way every morning.

It was a troop of Household Cavalry, ambling and clattering and jingling towards them. The light flashed on the plumeless helmets, on silver bits and golden spurs: the red tunics and white gauntlets lit up the street as the noble black chargers jogged proudly along with tossing heads and waving manes. Two officers riding side by side led the way. They were in an undress uniform; but even the undress of this sumptuous corps was most splendid to look upon. Clara explained afterwards that neither men nor officers were in anything like the full glory which they could assume when occasion warranted display. But at the moment Clara was almost speechless—open-eyed and open-mouthed, watching the pageant as though it had been composed of some new kind of moving wax-works.

'Look,' she whispered in a gasp. 'Look—at him—at *him*.'

One of the officers was a big dark heavy man, a giant-like warrior: the other was tall and slender and young. He was talking and laughing and his eyes were blue and his face was pale—not sunburnt and weather-beaten as the other man's. Vivien, watching the shadow from the peaked cap rise and fall on the bridge of his nose, thought she saw the expression change from laughter to sadness. But, as he jogged by on his coal-black horse, he was certainly laughing. His teeth showed in a boyish smile, and he threw back his head, and his face and all of him, from the gold lace on his cap to the shining tips of his long boots as they just showed through the stirrups, was in full sunlight. And as he seemed to go dancing, flashing by, in a radiant smile of colour and light and beauty, Vivien, without thought or hesitation, elected him and appointed him to be now, henceforth, and for ever, her own dream prince.

'That,' said Clara, when the spell was broken by distance, and she had recovered the use of her glib little tongue. 'That, to my mind, is the most perfect swell of all of them.'

'Which one are you speaking of? The stout one or the slim?'

'The *slim*!' cried Clara. 'Didn't you *see* him? And I don't even know his name. It's too provoking. I have been dying to find him out for ages. I've often seen him before, Vivien. He must be a lord. I feel certain of *that* much. The other is the Honourable Clarence Something. He fought in Egypt and everywhere else. Mrs. Goff knows all about *him*.'

'But Clara, you told me the other day when the man came with Mrs. Arncliffe, that you admired *him* more than anybody else.'

'Oh no,' said Clara. 'Not in the same way. Claude Stanford is another style. He *was* Stanford: I found that out. He *is* splendid too, but it's quite in another way.'

And with this decision Vivien thoroughly agreed.

'I'll tell you one thing,' said Clara. 'I think he rather admired *me*.'

'I am sure he did, if he noticed you,' said Vivien politely, but a little surprised.

'Oh he noticed me, all right. He stared and his eyes simply burnt me up. I couldn't have stared back if I wanted to. Of course, a man like that wouldn't be likely to try to follow it up. But do you know, if he did, he is the sort of man I should be rather afraid of.'

'Why?'

'Oh, I don't know,' and Clara dismissed the subject with a shrug of her shoulders.

But a little later she worked back to Mr. Stanford again.

'He is her cousin—and he is something else as well. Mrs. Goff says they are all about the very fastest lot going. She says Mrs. Arncliffe, for all she's received, goes on simply dreadfully. And she *looks* it, doesn't she? Well, Mr. Stanford's one. He's always with her. But there are lots of others. There's a young Lord somebody. Mrs. Goff told me the name, but I've forgotten it. One day he is going to be a Duke. And Mrs. Arncliffe thinks if she can keep him tied to her until her husband dies, then she'll make him marry her, and she'll be a Duchess. Her husband is an invalid; and Mrs. Goff says she's the woman to *poison* him sooner than let him stand in her way. It is horrid, isn't it all?'

Vivien thought it very horrid.

'I can tell you, Mrs. Goff does open one's eyes. She says all these guardsmen—cavalry and foot—are regular rips—all of them. Mr. Stanford was in the Guards once. She says smart society is so bad that you can't think anything too bad of them. She says the very tip-top set is just a revolving circle of—No, I

won't tell you that, though it *is* cleverly put. But Mrs. Goff does call a spade a spade.'

It was easy work at the shop, if you compared it with real work; but, nevertheless, it sometimes tired one. To-night Vivien was too tired to eat her dinner with enjoyment. She had felt hungry a couple of hours ago, but now in her attic with the meal all waiting for her she was in no hurry to begin. She put down the paper bag with the little loaf that she had bought at the baker's next the board school, and thought if a fairy gave her the choice of a good fire or a good dinner, she would choose the fire.

As the nights grew colder and colder she used to find it difficult to keep warm however much she wrapped up. But, with coals at sixpence the scuttle, firelight meant bankruptcy. It was a dreadful temptation to fight against. For this once more? No. Mrs. Kearsley had asked in the morning if another scuttle would be wanted, and the answer had been no. No. Even if one were justified in changing one's mind, it would not be fair to ask Mrs. Kearsley's maidservant to drag up such a burden from the bottom of the house to the top at this hour of night. No.

Then she went to the cupboard. Here, carefully covered with napkin or paper, were her spirit lamp, tea-pot and tea-tray, her cutlery and china and glass, together with the materials of her ordinary fare—a pot of jam, a box of sardines or a vase of potted meat, and butter. The house provided nothing; but at a small additional charge, the house washed up and bought a jug of milk of an afternoon when the lodger, away at her work, could not cater for herself.

Her fingers were so numbed by cold that she nearly dropped the sardines—almost a full box of them—and the jug chinked against the glass as she poured out her milk. The too generous warmth of the shop made the cold more difficult to support at home. It really was becoming bitterly cold.

Then all at once she yielded to temptation and went down to the kitchen to ask for another scuttle. It was reckless and wrong, but to-night she was too tired to fight with the tempting thought. The servant was out and, as Vivien could not think of troubling Mrs. Kearsley, she said she would carry her own coals. But Mrs. Kearsley, on her side, could not trouble Vivien to do this. So they carried the coals together, by alternate flights; and Vivien was very sorry for the little maid who generally performed this task unassisted, and Mrs. Kearsley perhaps found it a more arduous exercise than, in conversation

with her servant, she ever admitted. Mrs. Kearsley lit the fire with her own hands, and applauded her lodger for her decision.

'You'd been perished without one,' she said. 'Good-night miss. When you've done and put your tray outside the door, please put it right away from the stairs. Last night, the new lady in the front room all but stepped into it. And that *would* have been a pretty kettle of fish.'

And then in the full warmth of the fire, with her one candle burning brightly, Vivien at last sat down to dinner, after asking some distinguished companion to join her at table:—the well-known Mr. Dickens or the celebrated Mr. Thackeray, the highly-respected Professor Carlyle, and sometimes even the Right Honourable the Lord Tennyson. None of them ever refused. These great people all tried to be as entertaining as they could, each in his different way; and if they failed, or seemed to be getting tedious or repetitive, she just shut them up with far less ceremony than she would have employed in shutting up Clara or Marian had she been the offender.

But to-night she was too tired to eat and too tired to read. She was too tired to do anything but dream.

It was a lapse into a bad habit, and she struggled against the temptation. Bauermann had said so; and Bauermann was never wrong. It unfitted for life-work. And she wanted so much to be strong and fit for life-work. She roused herself; took a gulp of milk; and got up and changed her book. As she stood before the fire the thought came to her of poor Aunt Burnett and the wine and spirit decanters. After all, that was only a bad habit, but to what misery it led one. You could not break yourself of bad habits too early or too severely. She struggled; but the yielding to that other temptation of the coals seemed to have weakened her.

Then, as she sank into her wicker armchair, she gave up the struggle, and in a thought-whisper uttered the naughty, foolish words and at once the dream wrapped her in its folds.

Suppose and suppose!

She was almost frightened by the power and volume of the dream shadows as they rushed in upon her. They flowed over her head, like sun-warmed waves of waking sleep. They rolled all round her and over her: drowning her in a warm firelit depth of thinking slumber. And then in a moment she realised that her dream had thus gained in strength because the prince who reigned over the dream had been made incarnate. He was a shadow no longer. He had come to life.

Suppose and suppose she ever met him to talk to, what would he say? And he said everything that was charming. 'Oh no,'

said Vivien, laughing and chatting, and making innocent fun with her prince. 'This is not quite the first time I have seen your high and mightiness. I had the supreme felicity of seeing you and your preposterously over-dressed men all a cock horse one morning near the Marylebone Road.' 'And *I* didn't see you? I must have been blind.' 'Oh no my lord, not blind, but making such use of your eyes to admire your shining boots and your white gloves and your gold lace, that you hadn't a glance to spare for poor girls standing on the pavement.'

X

ONE Sunday afternoon Mrs. Kearsley asked Vivien to mind the front door for an hour or two.

'No one 'll come—except it should be my friend Mrs. Skinner. If you 'd be so kind as to step down and tell her I *do* expect her to supper but not before—and make quite sure you close the door miss.'

On the day of rest, Mrs. Kearsley's and all Marefield Street with close-drawn blinds habitually lay late. The whole street slumbered through the long morning hours, lulled by the music of the church bells which alone broke the Sunday silence. Newsagents and milkmen, respecting the slumber of the toilers, discreetly slipped the *People* or *Lloyd's* under doors and softly deposited cans behind area railings without uttering a whisper, much less a cry. Then at about one o'clock the street slowly and still sleepily roused itself. The Eaglesham Arms and The Enterprise opened their doors to the group of staunch supporters who had gathered within the last quarter of an hour. With the opening of the public-house doors, all the oven doors seemed to open also, and there came forth a heavy creeping odour of baked meat and brown potatoes. The bustle and stir of Sunday dinner had begun, and in all directions the slatternly maids of the upper end of the street crossed from pavement to pavement with beer jug in hand, while little dirty and nearly ragged children staggered back towards the squalid lower end of the street with the smoking burden of the weekly banquet from the baker's kitchen.

For the next two hours the poor little shoppies, who formed the bulk of the lodger population, were steadily dressing themselves in the incredibly rich Sunday finery which was indeed the major aim and object of the long year's labour. By three o'clock they were ready for their young men, and all along the street the waiting young men were looking up the steps in a sudden glow of satisfaction as the splendid visions of fashionable millinery burst upon their expectant eyes. From the crest of their aigrets to the brown paper soles of their patent shoes the foolish shoppies were an entirely spurious imitation of the real

article. But it was truly a marvellously clever imitation. At a very little distance it *was* the real thing: an original by a master hand, and not a meretricious copy by a skilled trickster. As the dingy hall-doors emitted all these fashionably dressed girls, the illusion was so strong that they might have been Mayfair and Belgravia doors pouring forth the real Lady Marys and Lady Sibyls for a saunter with their lordly lovers. Feather and fur and lace and tulle, the soft rich half-tones, the gay un-crude colour, the pearls round the slender necks, the pearls in the shell-like ears, the grace and the mystery and the frivolity and the frow-frow of aristocratic beauty decked without a care for the cost—it was all there, if you looked at it from a very little distance, as the foolish shoppies came out of the dingy doors to join their waiting sweethearts.

These pale young men, strolling to and fro, or giving faint shy rings of the bell and pre-arranged masonic tappings on panels, had not slept through the music of the Sunday bells. They had been far afield on their wheels while clothes-loving Beauty lay supine. Vivien, from the top of an omnibus one Sunday morning, had seen them spinning along in compact little groups of ten or a dozen—heads on handles, backs arched nearly flat, wheel after wheel with scarce an inch between—as they darted through the Sunday traffic and flashed away towards the far-off country. Brown and faceless and shadowy—from the top of the omnibus—they looked like small swarms of fish seen for a moment as they darted through a shallow and transparent stream. In imagination, Vivien had followed them racing away by broad open high roads among bare meadows and under leafless trees, in the far-off country, where the light frost made the gravel crackle as though they were spinning upon a carpet of silver filings, and the great town was only a smoke-cloud behind them —a low gate of fog which they had raced under to reach this crisp bright outer air. But now, by three o'clock, the brave fellows had had their exercise and their dinner and were ready for their love—waiting, cigarette in mouth, each for his own dear picture hat, his own dear brown paper shoes.

By half-past three scarce a lodger remained behind the blistered, weather-stained, and paint-hungering doors of Marefield Street. Mrs. Kearsley's was empty, except for its temporary guardian. Vivien had heard them all go out:—the new lady, her neighbour under the slates, who came from the furniture shop near the church of Holy Trinity; the two middle-aged ladies in the back and front room below, who came from the Mantle Department of the queer old shop, Staunton and Berwick's, where in spite of all the competition they still did a

sound business with an elderly and dowdy clientèle, and where pretty faces and graceful figures were neither sought nor wished for in the showrooms; Mrs. Moriarty and her assistant, who shared the bedroom behind the parlour in which customers for the Robes were received; Mrs. Kearsley and the maid-servant from the basement. Somebody had come for each; or each had gone out to look for somebody. Well, she herself could have a solitary stroll later on, in the dark, when Mrs. Kearsley returned. And after her stroll, somebody would be coming for her also—Marian, to spend the evening.

The sound of the front door bell almost startled her, and when she answered it, she was quite startled to find on the steps, instead of Mrs. Skinner, the dark man who had come to the shop with Mrs. Arncliffe.

'Oh, Miss Shelton,' said Mr. Stanford. 'How awfully lucky to find you in. I got your address from your friend—You know, your nice friend with the pretty red hair. But it's so fine that I feared you would be out. You *ought* to be out, you know.'

Then Vivien asked him, with breathless astonishment, why he wanted to find her in.

'Well—my pretty cousin Mrs. Arncliffe, you know—was so sorry she had offended you.'

'And did she ask you to come and tell me this?' asked Vivien.

'She asked me—in the shop, don't you know—to say everything I could think of. But do come out. I mustn't keep you standing there. Come and have a little walk.'

'Oh, I can't possibly.'

'Then let me come in.'

Vivien hurriedly explained that she had no nice sitting-room of her own in which to receive visitors.

'Well then do go and put on your hat and come out. It is wicked to stay in on such a ripping afternoon.'

'But the door. I can't leave that,' said Vivien, thinking this strange male visitor both troublesome and obtuse. 'I have promised Mrs. Kear—, my landlady, to mind the door.'

'Oh, never mind the door—let it mind itself. Mind me instead,' and he smiled. 'Or mind it from the outside. You really might do that. If we can't do anything else, we can walk up and down—keeping the door in sight, I mean, so that if people come we can attend to them.'

'No, I don't think I can,' said Vivien.

'Do,' said Mr. Stanford. 'If you won't even do that, I shall think that you have taken a dislike to me.'

It was a curious thing to say, and it made her blush faintly,

because she was at the moment thinking that this was exactly what she had done. He was a man of about thirty-five, and his politeness and his dark watchful deference were vaguely oppressive. But suddenly Vivien felt ashamed of herself for her ingratitude. The man by his kindness and consideration had—as Marian said—certainly saved her from dismissal that day.

'And I have things which I really must speak to you about.

'Very well,' said Vivien; 'if you don't mind keeping within sight of the door, I *will* come out,' and she ran upstairs for her jacket and hat.

They walked to and fro, side by side: downward as far as the Malplaquet Buildings, and upward to the dairy. It was a restricted promenade, but it was pleasant to be out in the air.

'Well,' said Vivien, 'what are the things you have to say?'

Mr. Stanford stroked his moustache and smiled, but appeared to find a difficulty in coming to the point. 'Well, my cousin, don't you know. I think she must have taken a fancy to you at first sight.'

'Oh what nonsense! She said I was stupid. And she called me a Maypole.'

'No? She couldn't have said anything so foolish. In any case, you know of course you are the sort of Maypole lots of people would like to dance round.' And Mr. Stanford laughed in a most friendly manner.

'Oh, what a pretty compliment,' said Vivien, laughing too. 'So very neatly turned and well thought out. Is that the sort of thing you say to Mrs. Arncliffe?'

'Don't let's talk about her any more. Tell me something about yourself. Do you ever go to theatres and things of an evening.'

'No, I don't.'

'What do you do? Sit at home and read a good book?'

'Yes—that's precisely what I do do.'

'Isn't it rather dull? But I believe you are tremendously clever. You look clever as well as—I forgot you don't approve of compliments on Sundays.'

In spite of his smiles and good-natured manner, there was something repellent which seemed to check confidence. But, after two or three turns up and down, Vivien was pleased to find this impression fading; and gradually her tongue was loosened and she prattled gaily. She had not wanted to talk about herself, but really he compelled her. He praised her literary taste, and bowed to her superior judgment on matters of criticism. He ventured again to tell her that she was an astonishingly clever girl. It was quite a privilege to listen to her It was

rare to meet with so much erudition, together with such a wide knowledge of the world, in one so young.

'But forgive me for interrupting you,' he said when Vivien, now feeling very friendly indeed, was explaining her views on political economy. 'There is a lady desiring admittance at your house.'

In the enjoyment of their walk and the highly intellectual conversation, she had forgotten the door altogether. Mrs. Skinner snapped the sequence of her ideas, and when the message had been given to Mrs. Skinner, there was only time for two or three more turns before the twilight began to change to darkness.

'Very well,' said Mr. Stanford. 'If you tell me to go, I'll go. I will do anything you tell me. Of course I should like to stay walking up and down all night.'

'You may if you like, you know,' said Vivien facetiously. 'This is quite a public thoroughfare. But I must really go in now. Good-night.'

'Good-night. No. Spare me one more moment. I do so want to see you again—will you let me? Look here, I am leaving London almost directly—going to the South—but when I come back will you be friendly and nice—as you have been to-day—and let me see you now and then?—Be kind and promise.'

He urged this petition very strongly, holding her hand in his until she drew it away.

'You see, I may be away for months, and meantime you'll be making all sorts of new friends, and of course you'll forget all about me unless you promise. If you make the promise, I know you will keep it.'

He pleaded earnestly; and, with every word he said, the pleasant friendly feeling produced by their recent talk seemed to slip away, while in its place there came creeping back the unwelcome sense of oppression, if not absolute distaste.

'If you don't say yes, you will make me think I have offended you. And yet I have done nothing to offend you, have I? I have been very obedient, haven't I?'

And he offered to shake hands again.

'Good-night,' said Vivien, opening the door with her latchkey. She was sure now, although still without reasoned thought, that she did not like him. He had been kind in the shop, and no one could say that he was not a good listener; but, on the whole, she did not want to see him again.

Yet by the time she had reached her room, she felt sorry that she had been quite so curt. Without making any absurd pro-

mises, she might perhaps have shown that she was grateful to him for all the trouble he had taken. She might have shown a little gratitude to him for saving her from being the one poor shoppy in all Marefield Street—in all London perhaps—with nobody thinking about her on Sunday afternoon.

In the evening Marian related how Mr. Stanford, meeting her yesterday in Sloane Street, had begged to be favoured with Miss Shelton's address, because his famous cousin wished to take Miss Shelton for a Sunday drive.

'And she never came? Only Mr. Stanford by himself?' said Marian thoughtfully. 'Well dear, I suppose you know what it means?'

But Vivien did not know.

'He has fallen in love with you. At any rate it is he who has taken the fancy to you, and not Mrs. Arncliffe—'

Vivien repudiated this ridiculous idea almost indignantly.

Mrs. Wardrop was a creature of moods, and subject to bursts of anger for which, as she said, no one was more sorry than herself after the little storm was over.

'By God,' cried Mrs. Wardrop, 'I'll make them pay for this!' and she brought her fist down upon the open newspaper.

In one of her advertisements in a ladies' journal, the compositors at the last moment had put *skirts* instead of *shirts*. It had been all as it should be on the proof: the public had been invited to come and buy the pretty new Japanese silk shirts; but then, after it had been passed for press, some idiot in the office had changed it, thinking, poor fool, that only men wear shirts, and that of course skirts had been intended. And this had happened again and again, driving Mrs. Wardrop to uncontrolled fury. The newspaper proprietors seemed powerless to avert it. Once a poor pale-faced compositor had come round to Mrs. Wardrop from this very newspaper to plead on behalf of wife and children for leniency and intercession. He would lose his place unless Mrs. Wardrop would write a line to say that his humble apologies had appeased her. Mrs. Wardrop had written the line, but now the thing had happened again and her anger knew no bounds.

'I'll bring an action for damages, I will, so help me. Don't stand staring at me like a stuffed pig, Clara. Nor you either, Miss Draper—I'll make somebody pay for this, I will.'

And the Misses Draper and Nicholson withdrew in confusion. They had no desire to pay for the printer's error themselves. Mrs. Wardrop felt so excessively irritated because just over her head there was a real skirtmaker. 'Amabelle' on the first floor.

was a poor lady who had been in business for the last twelve months, and with whom Mrs. Wardrop was at feud. This Mrs. Carey was a widow, and in an evil hour she and her pale daughter had embarked on their enterprise, and ever since had been drawing steadily towards the end of their resources. No one ever went upstairs to buy Amabelle's specialité of skirts for the bicycle, although all the world came and bought blouses for the bicycle on the floor below. But it tortured Mrs. Wardrop to think that this advertisement might cause some wanderer to find her way to Amabelle.

Mrs. Carey had brought this unkind feeling on herself. Quite early in her career she had rubbed Mrs. Wardrop the wrong way by sending a haughtily worded letter to suggest a business alliance.

'I therefore propose that you should send your customers to me and I will send mine to you. I am prepared to allow any commission that may be usual,' etc.

Everything was wrong in this letter; and Mrs. Wardrop had answered it with scorn and derision.

'Had she come down to me and asked my aid as one lady to another,' said Mrs. Wardrop, 'I might have done what I could, as one lady when properly treated is always glad to do for another. But to pass me in that passage with scarcely a nod in response to my good morning, and then to address me in such a tone! I never in all my life have met with such consummate impertinence.'

This morning while Mrs. Wardrop still fumed, there came in Mr. Pritchard, the traveller from Brent and Cooper's. He was a dapper little man who always wore a buttonhole in his frock coat; and he had a pleasant chatty manner which Mrs. Wardrop usually liked. He introduced the topic of trade and fashion as though an afterthought; and indeed, but for the fact that his brougham was so completely filled with cardboard boxes that there was hardly room in it for himself, he might well have passed for a little doctor going his rounds.

'No,' said Mrs. Wardrop, 'don't waste your time or mine please. I don't want to hear the name of Brent and Cooper for three months at least. What I have of yours isn't moving; and, if you ask my opinion, you are completely dropping behind the times.'

It was a dreadful reception and even Mr. Pritchard was disconcerted.

'I had something that we particularly wanted to introduce under your auspices,' he muttered feebly. But, down by the door, Clara smiled upon him, and he rallied instantly.

'Well, Miss Clara, somebody's got out of bed the wrong side this morning, haven't they?'

Vivien, overhearing, was shocked by the familiarity of the little man, and, when he had gone, chid her young friend for permitting it.

'How can you allow him to call you Miss Clara?'

'Oh, poor man, he doesn't know any better.'

'No, but you do.'

Clara was busily pinning a bunch of Parma violets into her black blouse, and did not reply to this charge.

'And oh, Clara! He has given you his buttonhole, and you have accepted it.'

'Why not?' said Clara, admiring the effect of the violets as reflected in the looking-glass. 'How you do lecture one. Where's the harm in it? Why, the girls in the tea-shops take *tips* from men they don't know, and I am sure it can't be wrong to take a bunch of flowers from a man you do.'

Vivien could not trust herself to continue the conversation. She would certainly wound if she gave her candid opinion.

'He's common,' said Clara, defending herself, 'but he's not a bad little feller—in a way. Besides what rubbish! I'm sure if any one offered you some flowers as nicely as he did, you'd take them yourself.'

But this was too much.

'If you really knew me, or knew what you were talking about, said Vivien with flashing eyes, 'you'd know that I would trample them under foot sooner than accept them.'

'Less noise,' cried Mrs. Wardrop. 'Good gracious me, young ladies, do you think I pay you to chatter and squabble as though the whole place belonged to you?' and she came and set them to work.

When Mrs. Wardrop was in her fiery mood, or had left her couch on the wrong side, as the plebeian Mr. Pritchard said, one could not help thinking of the precariousness of the weekly pound. An angry, unjust reproof, a quick, unconsidered answer, and you might find yourself outside the shop door. That was how a vacancy at Mrs. Wardrop's had often come about. Vivien thought of it frequently. She knew that she owed her great success to chance, as well as to Marian. Dear Marian had settled her in life once, but it might not be in Marian's power to give her a fresh start. Yet, on the whole, she felt happy in her mind. A great compliment had been carried to her. Mrs. Wardrop had said that she was a 'born saleswoman.' Now, if she could sell blouses a little—only a very little—better than another girl, she ought to survive in the struggle for existence.

This much at least she had derived from the late Mr. Darwin. She was sure that the theory would hold good here. If she could dispose of fifty blouses while any one else would have got rid of only forty-nine, Mrs. Wardrop would be greedy to keep her inside the door. For Mrs. Wardrop was a *stinge*.

There could be no doubt of it. Vivien—remembering the great wrong that she had done to Mrs. Maitland—struggled against the conviction; but, in this case, a mistake was impossible. Mrs. Wardrop proved it every day, and all day long.

Coming out of the shop one evening Vivien found the tall dark figure of Mr. Claude Stanford in the lamplight outside.

'This *is* luck. I was passing and I saw the blinds being pulled down, so I waited on the chance of seeing you.'

'But you said you were going to Monte Carlo.'

'So I am. To-morrow. I am so glad to have had an opportunity of saying good-bye.'

Vivien had crossed the street in silence, and he had walked with her. But on the opposite pavement she stopped abruptly.

'Well then, good-bye. I hope you will have fine weather.'

'Good-bye,' and he held her hand in his, but did not shake it. 'I will escort you a little farther if you don't mind.'

'I would rather not take you out of your way.'

'But you are not in the least. Your way is my way.'

'I am sure it isn't.'

'It is really. I am going by Pont Street and down Marefield Street. And that is your way, isn't it?'

So then Vivien walked on again.

'Miss Shelton, I am sure you don't mean to be, but I think you are rather unkind. The other day you were so nice and friendly—when we talked about the housing of the poor and all that—most interesting it was—that you made me feel quite happy. I thought I had made a real friend.'

'I don't make friends easily I am afraid.'

'Oh yes you do. You mean you don't grant your friendship easily.'

But, to this Vivien made no reply, although he paused before he continued.

'Well I am mortified—humiliated. I felt so sure you were really a friend—that I was going to ask you a favour.'

Vivien stopped short. Really nothing but Marian's foolish talk had occasioned her constraint. After his kindness in the shop he must naturally think that she would be glad to show that she was grateful if he gave her an opportunity. Only insane

vanity could twist into his tone and manner to-night anything but friendly kindness.

'Oh please say what it is, and of course if it is anything I can help you in, I'll do it.'

Mr. Stanford smiled and stroked his moustache, but appeared to have forgotten what the favour had been.

Vivien watched his face anxiously. She hated herself for having treated him so badly.

'Your advice,' he said, looking at a brilliantly lighted shop window as though for inspiration, 'about buying a present. I want to buy some flowers for somebody—I am going to the land of flowers and she isn't, don't you know? I only wish she was—Well I don't know what sort of flowers to get. Of course *you* would know in a moment.'

They were now just outside the fine flower shop.

It was a delight to stand among the lovely flowers, to drink in the sweet faint perfume of the roses and the lilies of the valley. It was as though from the winter of the street one had stepped into the factitious summer which wealth can create as its perpetual shelter. But these flowers were of course iniquitously dear, and Vivien found a difficulty in advising. She wanted if possible to keep down the outlay. In her over-active imagination she had seen the flashing Mrs. Arncliffe receive the gift, and after a careless glance lay it down amidst other offerings.

The flower girl would give no assistance likely to lead to economy, and at last gathered together a magnificent floral trophy of the soft yellow roses and the wax-white lilies and lilac, and tied it about with a bow and streamers of yellow and white satin ribbon.

Vivien saw with horror the gold pounds counted down upon the desk, and felt personally guilty: as if by giving her advice she had been an accomplice in an actual crime. Indeed, to throw away on this winter night the income of at least three of the households at the lower end of Marefield Street seemed to her a monstrous and impiously conceived outrage on right feeling, however rich one might happen to be.

Mr. Stanford carried his wicked purchase all the way to Mrs. Kearsley's, where the fragrance of the spendthrift blossoms mocked the cold night air of the poverty-stricken street; and then, when Vivien bade him good-night and thought that he wanted to shake hands, he transferred it into her long fingers and deftly closed them round the bouquet's stem.

'Oh, what do you mean?' cried Vivien piteously. 'Please take them away.'

But Mr. Stanford laughingly withdrew down the steps.

'You chose them yourself. Good-night,' and he turned and walked swiftly away—back towards the fine red houses and the fine rich folk. He was gone in a moment.

She could not very well run after him, and really there was only one thing left for her to do. The moment had arrived to trample the flowers under foot. But she could not do it. She was angry with him for his immense duplicity; she was angry with herself for her colossal stupidness—to be caught by so patent a trick—and she was almost crying when she thought of Mr. Pritchard and Clara and the Parma violets; but she could not close the distressing incident by trampling.

The hot-house perfume filled her attic with an almost enervating sweetness. She felt compelled to light a fire out of charity to the flowers themselves. It would be inhuman not to keep them warm when one considered the luxurious surroundings in which they had been reared. And—poor flowers —*they* were not to blame. Yet, innocent and lovely as they looked, they seemed to spread on their faint soft breath nothing but vexing, worrying thoughts.

Mrs. Maitland had given her full instructions as to lions in the path, but she had never said a word about serpents.

XI

THE flowers faded rapidly, and Vivien's exaggerated distress of mind faded with them. The man had gone. In his world—the world of countless pounds a week—perhaps it was not unusual to pay extravagantly expensive compliments to every chance acquaintance. He wrote to her from Beaulieu, asking her not to forget him; but she did not answer the letter, and she heard of him no more.

She was happy in her work; every one was kind to her; every one smiled upon her. As she walked about the great town—even in the strangest paths of the mighty labyrinth—the Spirit of Sudden Sadness lurked out of sight and rarely, if ever, pounced. Far afield, in the parks and Mayfair Squares, she would meet faces that she had already learned to know: faces of politicians, actors, generals, of the fashionable patrons of Mrs. Wardrop, or of people to whom her attention had once been drawn, such as the old fellow with the forked beard—a sturdy old peer or commoner, as the case might be, unceasingly stamping the pavements and never driving. Close to home she seemed to know everybody, and many seemed to know her. The old Irishman, with a medal on his tattered coat, who swept the crossing by the church, never failed to give her greeting, and seemed embarrassed when now and then he received a penny for his civility; the sergeant on the police station steps touched his cap and smiled; and on sunny mornings there was a man who walked in the sunlight on the western pavement above Lennox Gardens, and he too smiled as she passed by.

He was beautifully dressed, and he walked to and fro in the sunlight very slowly as though there were invisible ropes to his heels drawing him back at every step. He carried a walking-stick in each hand, and he used to give Vivien an unutterably tired smile. It was kind and friendly—the recognition of ant by ant in the vast ant-heap—but it was an intolerably sad smile.

She had many friends: amongst whom were a tea-shop girl introduced by Clara, a typewriting girl, three bonnet-shop girls,

There were also two most successful girls, known to Marian, who wrote for the newspapers, and lived together in extraordinary luxury at Malplaquet Buildings.

At home Mrs. Kearsley had become a real friend, and she took a friend's privilege by confiding private troubles to her lodger's sympathetic ear.

Death had carried off a troublesome husband and two troublesome sons, and left Mrs. Kearsley with an orphan nephew who was a source of pride and of pain. Mrs. Kearsley had fed and clothed and educated him to the age of sixteen, and from that point of his career he had done so well for himself that he was heartily ashamed of his humble aunt. As a bank clerk in a midland town he hoped to make an advantageous marriage, and he earnestly pleaded that Mrs. Kearsley would assist him in this aim by carefully guarding the secret of their relationship. In these circumstances Vivien, acting as secretary for her landlady, had written him one or two dignified, but scathing, letters.

'Ah, miss,' said Mrs. Kearsley, 'don't let's be too hard on him. He is a man. It is all said in that word. And he really has made himself quite the gentleman. You can see that for yourself by what he says.'

At the shop itself, after three months' hard work, Vivien felt that she was popular with the customers. There were some who always asked for her, and a few who declined to be served by anybody else. And indeed she did not spare herself with these kind customers, but puckered her brows in deepest reasoned thought, thinking with them and for them, resolutely determined, if it lay in her power, to provide each with exactly the right thing for the customer: whereas perhaps Clara, for instance, with the best intentions in the world, failed, because she somehow could never quite dismiss from her mind the erroneous fancy that she, and not the customer, was suiting herself with the blouse.

'But honestly, Miss Shelton,' the customer would say, 'is it not too *young*?'

Then Vivien weighed the customer and the blouse with the fine balance of her active brain. In imagination she followed the stout middle-aged lady to her home in Bayswater, and saw her come down to breakfast in these big handkerchief sleeves: saw the startled eyes of the whole family circle drawn by the dainty guipure insertion, the front yoke of crêpe de chine so finely tucked and gauged, and the bouffant waist-setting of the slim body. She herself in imagination was at the breakfast-table, and she turned to the opened door to consider Auntie—

to see if Auntie's new blouse was a real success, or if it only made her look ridiculous.

'*I* like it, you know. It fascinates me. But, Miss Shelton, *dare* I?'

And then Vivien made her announcement. 'No. On the whole I really think we might do better than this.' Or 'Yes indeed you may dare.' She never offended. They bowed their heads under such an adverse decision, or they clapped their hands and almost danced when the verdict was favourable to their ambition; but in either event they were grateful, and before going they thanked Miss Shelton for all she had done for them, and even pressed her hand with inarticulate emotion.

Such lamb-like friendly customers made one's work a pleasure, and their visits often created bright spots on otherwise dull days. But all the customers were a source of amusement, interest, and instruction. There were strange customers and there were queer customers. In time Vivien came to understand there were some very queer customers indeed.

These as a class were over-dressed, over-hatted, over-painted, and most grossly over-scented. Miss Inman watched them with contemptuous and no longer sleepy eyes, and said, 'Did you ever?' while Clara tossed her head and ejaculated, 'Upon my word'; but Mrs. Wardrop only remarked that their money was as good as anybody else's.

One such typical queer customer left a chocolate-coloured poodle outside the door, and Vivien went out, knelt upon the mat, caressed him, and vainly endeavoured to win his regard by calling him a lamb. He shivered so piteously in the cold air that she very improperly connived in his plan to slip into the shop on the first opportunity.

And then, when the painted customer struck him cruelly on his poor soft nose with her gold-topped umbrella and made him howl, Vivien hotly told her that she ought to be ashamed of herself.

'Oh, damn the dog!' said the customer. 'If you are so fond of dogs I've half a mind to give him to you. But I mustn't do that I suppose. My friend only gave him to *me* a week ago last Saturday.'

After she had gone Clara explicitly explained to Vivien that the customer had many, many reasons why she should be ashamed of herself—besides her harsh treatment of animals.

Gradually she understood, and henceforth could recognise them unfailingly—with all the gross signs that marked their shameful place in the labyrinthine scheme of existence—as they

loitered on the pavements, sped by in cabs, or rolled luxuriously in private broughams. They were man-lures, man-traps—nothing else. But as she thought for a moment of the coarse and bestial nature of a prey to be caught by traps so baited, the ugliness of life appalled her, the veiled horror of this sunlit world of men and mice seemed to rise and loom and tower like a veiled, gigantic, shapeless figure flinging wide its dusky shroud, blurring and obliterating even the sunlight.

Quite at the top of the man-trap scale, of comparatively complicated design, possibly the most expensive trap at present on the market, was the beautiful and notorious Mrs. Granby. Mrs. Wardrop herself was pleased to wait upon her. Those signs, if to be detected at all, were but faintly perceptible in Mrs. Granby. She was tall and sumptuously dressed, and she flashed and glowed with a fire almost equal to Mrs. Arncliffe's. But perhaps, while Mrs. Arncliffe could display a natural glitter, Mrs. Granby could only shine with an artificial light; and if one laughed shrilly, the other almost screamed in her mirth.

'Vivien,' said Clara one day at lunch, 'Mrs. Goff has come back at last. I dined with her last night. Only me and another girl—the funniest girl you ever saw—more like a boy. But it was a jolly good dinner, and Mrs. Goff told me heaps of things I 've been simply dying to know.'

Vivien laid down her book and smiled. She hated this unseen Mrs. Goff, but was aware that Clara would brook no disrespect of her friend.

'First and foremost, do you remember that lovely officer—the one I showed you?'

Vivien remembered him extremely well.

'He *is* a lord. I was sure of that much. He is the Earl of Helensburgh.'

Helensburgh! The name sounded familiar to Vivien. Yes. That was the name of the nobleman with whom papa had dined years ago during her visit to Berkeley Street. But papa's friend would be quite an old man. This must be a son of papa's Lord Helensburgh.

'I am sure it's right; and Vivien, he is the man I told you about—the one who is fond of Mrs. Arncliffe, who is going to be a duke. She and he and the husband, Mrs. Goff says, are just playing a triangular game, with Death holding the stakes for them. She does put things well. Almost witty, like the things they say in plays. But Vivien, he is most awfully dissipated. He 's always at Mrs. Granby's house. But *that's* nothing. They all go there. But he has a house on the river —at Twickenham'—and Clara opened her eyes widely—'where

he carries on the orgies of Philip of Orleans. Who was Philip of Orleans?'

'A French regent.'

'French?'

'Yes. You didn't suppose he was *Irish*?'

'I didn't know, and I wouldn't ask. I thought I'd find out. There must be books with his goings-on. Only they put them in Latin. I *am* so ignorant.'

Vivien told her something about this historical personage, but Clara's face grew blank and blanker, and her attention wandered.

'*History!* Oh, I *am* so ignorant.'

Poor girl! She was like a person with a digestion irreparably damaged, who can only eat specially prepared food. Give her Orleans in Bit-form—a scrap in one of her beloved papers—and she would read with gusto, and understand.

She loved her two papers in the orange and the green wrappers. Number after number they maintained their generous flow of chatty, 'snappy' odds and ends of information—such as, for instance, the disparity of total in the sum of the sexes over various stated areas; and their marvellous prize announcements made her eyes dilate and her cheeks flame with a weekly access of the gambler's fever.

'A pound a week, or a thousand pounds down! Which would you rather have, Vivien? . . . No, but do say. Just for fun. And why shouldn't one win it? *Somebody* must win it. Why shouldn't it be you or me? And only just a guess. It's to say the number of railway passengers out of London next Bank Holiday.'

And then Clara would insist upon reading them extracts from the diabolically ingenious advertisement.

'"Do you want a pound a week for life? Because that is precisely what we now offer you. You may do what you like with it when you get it. That will be your affair, not ours. You may spend it wisely or ill. If you are poor and feeble it may save you from starvation. If you are strong and rich it may be only so much loose pocket money—one pound every Saturday to pay for some of your pleasures, your follies, your own self-pamperings."'

'Oh Clara, do leave off,' said Marian once, with yearning nostalgic eyes. 'It quite unsettles me.'

'All right—only this one bit,' and Clara rattled on again. '"But that is not our business. This is what you may rely on. You will be able to fold your hands with this solid certainty:—for the rest of your life, whatever happens, you will

be in the receipt of one pound per week. Think of this! Think of this!"'

Certainly Vivien thought of it, although she never wasted a penny by filling up a coupon of the newspaper. If one was easy in one's financial circumstances, if one really had enough to live on—say thirty shillings a week, not the fabulous forty of luxury—how thoroughly happy one might be. Smiled on by friends, successful in one's work, strong in one's sense of youth and health, one might really go on one's way, like a happy child walking in the morning sunshine.

At last Mrs. Goff appeared upon the scene, and Vivien disliked her even more in the substance than in Clara's word-sketches.

She was a strong-framed woman of middle life, with coarse grey hair, and a broad face of a very masculine character in its square jaw and big lips. She was man-like in her laugh and decisive voice, but most feminine in her at once apparent habit of almost fulsome flattery.

She praised Clara before her face. 'I have heard a great deal about you, Miss Shelton, from this fascinating little person.' She praised Vivien at a quite inadequate distance behind her back. 'Tres distinguée! Even more attractive than you led me to suppose.'

She told Vivien that she loved the companionship of young people and would be glad to entertain her at dinner on an early date. But Vivien developed a series of evening engagements and begged therefore to be excused. Without explainable cause she really loathed Mrs. Goff's fulsome civility and excessive friendliness.

Mrs. Goff came in very frequently; and, when business was slack and Mrs. Wardrop was out, would sit by the fire or lounge about the shop for hours at a time. She was always ready to tell one anything one wanted to know, and much that one had better have escaped hearing. With regard to all the world of fashion, the rich, fine, idle folk whose movements were faithfully chronicled in the newspapers on the table, she was like another newspaper—an illicit, supplementary, libellous extra edition; and Vivien often thought that Mrs. Goff ought to be blacked out, or suppressed by the police, or burnt by the public hangman.

She had said that she always felt at home in the shop, but when Mrs. Wardrop came in unexpectedly and found her squatting by the fire, this comfortable sensation seemed to evaporate. Mrs. Goff sprang to her feet and greeted Mrs.

Wardrop with effusive warmth. Mrs. Wardrop was very nonchalant, and perhaps as nearly discourteous as is ever becoming in a lady.

'Miss Inman, Mrs. Goff tells me she called to see our latest models. Be good enough to show them,' and Mrs. Wardrop drawled. 'I fear you may find them marked higher than will suit your purpose.'

But Mrs. Goff was good-tempered always, and never huffy. She would talk of fashion and dress, and woo Mrs. Wardrop's ear assiduously. She would hit upon something startling which commanded attention.

'Well, ermine has come in with a rush at last.'

'What's that you say?' said Mrs. Wardrop sharply.

Vivien lifted her head and her eyes began to shine.

'Nothing but ermine, it seems it is going to be,' said Mrs. Goff decisively. 'I didn't believe there was so much ermine in the world. Go where you will, you meet it.'

'I don't know about that,' said Mrs. Wardrop frowning, but most intent. '*I* haven't seen anybody much in it.'

'Oh, *I* have seen *everybody*.'

'But who? *Who*? that's what I want to know.'

Vivien loathed Mrs. Goff, but she had come nearer and nearer, and was breathlessly listening to every word.

'*Who?*' cried Mrs. Wardrop loudly and rudely, carried out of decorum by the intensity of her interest. 'Who? That's the point. When I hear of something being brought in all of a hurry, I want to know under whose auspices. If you only mean you've seen a pack of chorus girls on the lawns at Brighton—'

But Mrs. Goff meant far more than this. She had seen one royal princess in ermine down at Brighton, two more in London, a duchess, a marchioness and a viscountess, several of Mrs Wardrop's own customers—'that Lady Augusta Lidstone for one.'

'Well, I suppose it's so then,' said Mrs. Wardrop finally. 'Funny, me not having heard of it! Funny thing too, another fur coming to the front like that with the winter half gone. I never knew that happen before in furs.'

That night Vivien carried to the cleaner and dyer by the police station the famous and ancient ermine of Mrs. Maitland. It seemed sadly yellow in the gaslight on the cleaner's counter; but, after minute examination, scarcely a trace of moth could be discovered, and pluck at it where you would the staunch old fur stood firm to the skin, and nothing to speak of came away in your fingers. It was well worth the cleaning.

Ten days or a week later Marian came to dine at Mrs.

Kearsley's and was entertained to sliced ham, jam puffs, and the sweetest lemonade that could be procured in glass bottles; and in the evening after dinner her hostess delivered the white, marvellously renovated fur into her skilled hands.

Marian laid the unpicked cape upon the top of Vivien's box; spread out certain brown paper patterns which had been provided by the talented Miss Crofts; and then hovered over the box in the full light of two candles, ominously snapping Miss Croft's tremendous shop scissors.

Vivien had been making tea with the spirit lamp and the tin kettle, but she watched now in tremulous excitement, the fingers of her right hand twitching restlessly about her lips; and when the great shears began to cleave the skin, she gave a little gasping cry. 'Oh Marian!'

But Marian, instructed by Miss Crofts, never faltered. She knew what she was about, and she triumphantly carried through the operation. It was in truth a reckless but necessary waste of rich material—similar in its character to the re-cutting of the Koh-i-nor: a vast loss of weight resulting in a vast gain of brilliance. They were simply carving out of the ancient démodé cape the very latest thing in tippets. And it was a triumphant success. It was handed over to Mrs. Moriarty, and in another week that lady, for the net sum of eight shillings, had finished it to perfection, with a lining of mauve shot brocade that made it as magnificent inside as out.

'It beats me,' said Clara with keen inquiring eyes. 'You look like a duchess. I don't know how you do it. I'm sure you don't spend one-fourth what I do.'

And Vivien, warm and happy and ermine-clad, glowed beneath her new tippet with pride and content. To look like a duchess, or, rather, to look like the Lady Sibyl or the Lady Mary, her Grace's daughter—that, stated in its plainest terms, was the dress difficulty which Vivien and each of the girls of her world had to meet and surmount. It differed not in essence but in extent from the task of the professional shoppy. The poor foolish shoppies wanted to look like Lady Sibyl on the way to Ascot, or as seen at the Marlborough House garden-party—from a little distance. Vivien and her friends were satisfied with an exact resemblance to Lady Sibyl taking her dachs for a run in Hamilton Gardens or coming home to luncheon after a forenoon's skating at Prince's—that is to say, Lady Sibyl in her least complex form. But the similitude must be so absolute that you might come close, stroke their fur and feel their feathers if necessary, and yet detect no trickery. It was a serious difficulty to surmount.

Cheap boots—when you have emerged from the brown paper stage—and dear boots are the same quite close; cheap frocks and dear frocks, especially of the sergey materials, are the same; black gloves are the same; plain jackets as worn this new year of ninety-seven are the same. But hats are not the same.

Vivien appreciated the difference clearly. The hats of Rudge, at the top of Sloane Street, or even at Ditchingham's in Wigmore Street, were as patently superior to the hats in the flaring windows of Bishop and Vine's the cheap shop in Oxford Street, as the pictures she loved to stand in front of at the National Gallery were superior to the wretched oleos at the second-hand furniture-dealers in the Fulham Road. She bought a black cloth jacket with smoked pearl buttons, at the cheap Oxford Street shop for fourteen shillings, that really was the same as the ten guinea thing from Hopcraft in Brook Street. She bought a skirt-length of cheviot serge on the last day of the remnant sale at Veal's in the Brompton Road, for six shillings, and Mrs. Moriarty for seven shillings and sixpence made it into a bell skirt that might have come direct from Paris. But she had to go to Wigmore Street for the black hat with the ostrich feathers and the velvet bow and the jet buckle. It cost twenty-seven shillings and ninepence.

She and Marian once, and she and Clara twice, on consecutive days, went to look at it through the windows, and mentally compared it with half the black hats in London. And on the fourth visit a fear seized her that if she trifled with destiny, or fed any longer upon baseless hopes of a sudden marking-down, the hat would be snapped up by another, so she made the instant plunge. Thus ducally she built herself up into the Sibylline dress-ghost: bell skirt above glacé kid shoes, jacket above skirt, and the hat above everything. But it was the royal ermine that gave the crowning touch. It was not until she put the tippet below the hat, that Clara spoke her wide-eyed approbation and Vivien knew that she had done well. Yet the dress problem was not completely solved. She was Lady Sibyl ready for a brisk stroll before or after lunch on a day when the weather was doubtful; but ask Lady Sibyl to tea and beg her to take off her jacket lest she should not feel the benefit of it when she got outside again, and you covered her ladyship with confusion. Fire or no fire, she could not remove her jacket.

But here fate itself seemed to intervene.

One night, when Clara had just pulled down the shop blinds, when Vivien was pushing in drawers and closing the press doors,

and Marian at the last moment had discovered a pile of things overlooked on an ottoman in a corner, Mrs. Wardrop suddenly began to stare, and to point with outstretched hand as though she had seen a haunting spectre.

'Upon my word, Miss Inman, you are not much of a saleswoman or you would have got rid of those four soils for me *somehow*, before this.'

They were the four soiled blouses: soiled ages ago in an accident with a cup of beef-tea. At intervals, they seemed mysteriously to rise to the surface of the season's goods; to spring unaided into view as most unwelcome reminders of Mrs. Wardrop's own carelessness. They had been marked down again and again; Miss Inman had made desperate efforts; but no customer would take even one of them, and Mrs. Wardrop had really come to hate the sight of them.

'What are they marked now?'

'One ten, one eleven, and two at two guass,' said Miss Inman, examining the tickets ruefully.

'Well,' cried Mrs. Wardrop, unexpectedly laughing, 'I am fairly sick of them. I done it myself; I may as well pay for it,' and she struck the table smartly with her open hand. 'Now girls, I'm going to give 'em away. Any one want a blouse? We'll have an auction for the lark of the thing.'

They clustered round the table.

'Miss Inman, turn 'em up in your books. . . . Found 'em? Well, look sharp—It's ages ago.'

'Parsons. Nottingham,' read Miss Inman, having found the entry at last. 'One-quarter of a dozen, Parisian Pompadours, unit price: ten-three, eleven-four, twelve-seven. One twelfth-dozz. Du Barri rose, thirteen one. Invoice date—'

'Oh, bother the date. Now then. Going, going— Without reserve. What offers? . . . Oh, you are all too slow. Look here, you shall have 'em at *cost* price. No interest charged.'

As the young ladies well knew, it was such an opportunity as does not often come in a bargain-hunter's way, and they were quick to profit by it. Miss Inman snapped up one; Clara another; and Vivien promptly secured the lovely Du Barri at thirteen shillings and a penny. Marian, watching with steady eyes and a pitiful yearning face, alone was silent.

'Now, Miss Draper. Are you going to be left behind? Ain't you going to have this odd one?'

But Miss Draper only shook her head sadly.

Then Clara took the odd one.

'Well done, Clara!' and Mrs. Wardrop gave a boisterously genial laugh. 'Take 'em away and say I've done handsome.

I shall stop it out of your screws a' Saturday. Thank God, that's the end of those four soils.'

It had been a wonderful chance. In all the mighty town Vivien could not have obtained such another blouse for less than four guass; and it completed her solution of the dress problem. Of course, these young ladies, although in the trade themselves, could never get anything direct from a wholesale house. As Clara said, Mr. Pritchard had once told her—she forgot how the subject came up, but she was almost sure that she had not asked him the question!—that he simply would not dare to abet any one in the attempt. Thus Vivien knew that she had done well, but the shadow of money difficulties was surely falling.

Mrs. Moriarty had tendered an estimate for supplying bodice material, and re-making in a good and workmanlike manner that other silk dress of poor Aunt Burnett's happy days, for the sum—approximate—of twenty-five shillings. But the accomplishment of this scheme must be postponed. If Vivien could have achieved the evening dress, she would have been able to challenge all London to come close, by night as well as by day. But she must now step warily on a darkening path.

At the end of this wonderful blouse week, she had only four shillings and a few pence remaining of her original capital. She had been living on capital all the time. Of the ten pounds that Mrs. Maitland had given her, Marian had absorbed three on loan, or as Vivien meant by a gift. Poor dear Marian! She worked so hard and she talked so wisely; and yet of her own affairs she seemed the worst possible manager. Vivien was sure of one thing: Marian was over-rented. Her room in Davis Street was too big and far too well furnished.

Three pounds for Marian; this dress-problem; and the rest all melted down in the usual bankrupt manner—excess of living expenses over income. Seven shillings for room, seven sixpences for breakfast, say two sixpences for coals. That left only seventeen sixpences, and there were *extras*. In spite of the inclusive agreement there were extras. Bath water, though provided only 'loo-warm,' was a threepenny extra; and there were several others. Vivien had been very careful. She had striven to keep her food bill to the lowest point, but even twopenny rolls mounted up to a considerable total. Happily all this dress outlay would not be recurrent. Except for the lesser calls of gloves and shoes and that sort of thing, she would be free of costume tax. Nevertheless there was gloom ahead. You could not live on a pound a week.

XII

VIVIEN had been over four months in London, and she felt on this Saturday afternoon that the time had come to pay a call upon her father.

Paintless, with big cracks and ugly patches where the stucco had fallen away into the areas, the house fronts of Berkeley Street bore on each the marks of the heavy hand of that colossal stinge, the Earl of Eaglesham. But it was time and not neglect that had so changed the street that Vivien could scarcely recognise it. When Mrs. Page opened the door, she too was changed almost beyond recognition. She was quite old, apparently; her once sandy hair was grey; she was slatternly beyond the border line of dirt.

'Yes, the colonel's in. But he's going out. He won't see you. Will you leave your name?' said Mrs. Page, suspiciously. Then, after the visitor's name had been given, 'Oh miss! Lor! Who'd have thought it? But, oh miss, you oughtn't to come here. He'll be angry, sure.'

It was not an inspiriting welcome.

'This is no place for you to come to, miss. Things are not as they should be in this house,' and she glanced fearfully behind her into the dark little hall. 'They are not, miss, though I say it. I've had a lot of trouble along of your pa. I'm well-nigh ruined, miss.'

Then from the gloom of the hall came another female voice.

'Who's that at the door? Anybody for me?' There was a sickening perfume of musk—a rank, thought-sickening blast of it, as this dreadful blowsy painted person in peignoir and satin slippers came forward to interrogate.

'What? Miss Shelton? Come to see the colonel? Well I never!' and she smiled at Vivien good-naturedly. 'You don't remember me; but I've seen *you* before. When you come here to stay with the colonel. I remember it as though it was yesterday. I used to live opposite.'

Vivien had shyly retreated to the steps.

'Come in. You'll find the colonel in his room. Go right in. You'll excuse me, but it's time I dressed.'

And Vivien, from the steps, saw that the woman was going up the stairs to the first floor. Mrs. Page looked after her with a most dirtily piteous face. Vivien paused irresolute. But then her father suddenly came out, and Mrs. Page obliterated herself in the shadow of the paintless door.

Oh how old he had grown! The thought was like a brain stab and a heart stab, and Vivien could hardly breathe as he came out of the darkness into the light and passed her on the steps. He was beautifully dressed, as of yore; his hat shone as he gravely lifted it and showed her his white hair. His forehead was bald, and his hair was quite white; his black moustache was dyed; those hollows by the temples were deeper —incredibly deeper; and the faint vein-pencillings were a wide network; but, as he bowed politely and passed on, there was a faint ray from the sunken eyes.

He had not recognised her: he had but given her the courteous salute due to a female stranger on his doorstep.

'Papa! Don't you know me?'

She had followed him as he strolled away towards the river.

'Vi!'

His hand shook. He seemed so greatly surprised that at first he could say nothing else.

'Vi! Vi! Is it really you?' And then he seemed to pull himself together; and the years began to drop from his shoulders. He had stooped, but now he stood erect; the light came darting up from the immeasurable depths; and, as they walked on side by side, the impenetrable mask of the father she had carried in her memory gradually re-composed itself.

'But where do you come from—from the stars? And Vi, so smart, so *comme il faut*. Such a splendid girl! Where is our Mrs. Maitland?'

'I have left her, papa. She lost all her money.'

'Lost her money? How?'

'Well, in a most unlucky speculation.'

'Silly old ass!' said papa. 'Thought she'd be clever and try and get twenty per cent., eh? I've no patience with such people—parsons and schoolmistresses. South African gold mines, I suppose, or some such nonsense?'

He really was papa of the old days—a magician in his rapid divinations.

'But who cares for Mrs. Maitland? It's *you* I want to hear about. You are not with her? Then *where* are you?'

Vivien explained; but, when she said the dreadful word, he stopped, and she stood trembling before him.

'A *shop*? Oh Vi!' his hand shook as he lifted it, and he

stooped perceptibly, and his steps came slower as he moved on. Vi—*my* daughter. In a *shop*. What shop?'

She hurried on with her explanation and he listened anxiously.

'The other girls! Ladies Vi? You are not deceiving me? By birth and education—ladies! And this Mrs.—What's her name? Your principal? You say, though not what *you* and *I* mean when we say a lady—still a lady by position and so forth. Oh Vi, what are we coming to? I had heard of this sort of thing, but, honestly, I never believed it. It is the end of the world to me.'

Nevertheless, as he talked, obviously he was habituating himself to the ugly notion. He pulled himself together, bracing himself to confront it.

'But Vivien, don't think me unkind. Was it quite right to take this step without consulting me?'

'I thought you would not mind.'

'You did not suppose I could be very pleased. I am not blaming you. No. You may have done the wisest thing—but— How long have you been in London?'

'Four months.'

'And without one word to me?'

Vivien's lower lip was trembling violently.

'Papa. I wasn't sure that you really wanted me.'

'*Vi!*'

They had come out by the river, where the dingy bridge looked dismally in want of its spring cleaning; and as though some mischievous spirit of the past, with unabated power to disconcert and to distress, were still haunting the spot, Vi gave three great sniffs. But she was provided with a handkerchief on this occasion, so she blew her nose, and resumed her hurried explanation.

'Papa. I did it for the best. I wanted to *please* you, not to make you angry. I thought and thought about it all—and, papa, I remembered all you told me that day at Greenwich—I quite understood it all—afterwards.'

'What? About those confounded solicitors?'

'No. About not going on—being a burden to you, for ever. So I thought I wouldn't now, but begin to fight for my own hand. And if I could come to you after three or four months and say I was supporting myself—quite independent—as I am—*almost*—not wanting to be a burden—you would be pleased with me—and even praise me.'

And she and the *genius loci* and the handkerchief met and wrestled.

'And I do praise you. My brave little Vi,' and he took her

hand and patted it. He was growing more reconciled to the appalling notion. 'But Vi, I never meant that I didn't wish to do—anything in my power for you.'

'I know—I am sure. But—' and she hurried on as fast as possible—'I thought perhaps—most likely—it wasn't in your power. I understood that it *couldn't* be, when I found out that Mrs. Maitland—the money owing. Papa!'

But now he dropped her hand and frightened her by the old sternness.

'What do you mean? This is something which must be cleared up. There must be no misunderstanding here. There was an arrangement proposed by her—I remember giving my consent—by which you were to take up the duties of her secretary. Do you mean that this arrangement was not carried out?'

'I helped her as much as I could.'

'As secretary. Good. Well, you don't mean to tell me that if she has the services of *my* daughter in such a position, she has the effrontery to prefer any claim against me for *schooling*—I mean any claim *after* that date? It was years ago.'

'Oh, papa, I was not the least use to her, really.'

'Then why didn't she say so and dismiss you? She was a free agent. Of course she was satisfied with you. I don't doubt you performed your duties excellently.'

Vivien hung her head. Papa's stern logic bore her down, although she was conscious of the flaws in it.

'And *before* that date? That, of course, is another matter. But, honestly, I doubt if we were not clear. If there was some small balance owing it was a deuced small one. We must look the matter up and clear it off, if there was one at all. But I don't think it's likely: for your good friend was the most persistent dun I ever met. I used to hate the sight of her handwriting.'

Then the stern mask changed and softened, and a fitful gleam came forth.

'No, Vi. The amiable and erudite dame, in telling you all this, evidently wanted you to help her in what is vulgarly called a little try-on. I am too old a bird to be caught by that sort of chaff. But no more of Mrs. Maitland. You *will* keep talking about her, when it is *you* I want to hear about.'

Then she told him everything which she thought might interest or amuse. As they walked side by side along the embankment, she was prattling and laughing; and he, too, laughed with keen relish every now and then. 'Splendid! Vi—I *must* see it all—one day—for myself. It is all so new to

me. A little incognito visit, eh? No names mentioned. Only an old friend of Vi's.' And, as she prattled, the gulf was spanned. With a nod and a smile or two, he made a conversational bridge for her to cross over and rejoin him. He paid her with compliments, as the schoolmistress said. 'I am proud of you, Vi. You have the grand air—everything. And you carry yourself so well—a straight-backed Shelton!' and he pulled his shoulders back and walked with head high.

Unconsciously, she had slid her arm into his, and was glowing with happiness. But, as they approached the fine red houses, he gently disengaged himself.

'Arm in arm, my dear, is not quite the fashion just now. These customs change. When I married your poor dear mother, it was different. It would have been a solecism *not* to give a lady one's arm in those days.'

They walked on in silence for a little way before he spoke again.

'Vi. Do you remember your mother's Greenwich cousins—the Carters?'

Vivien only remembered that there were such people, but she had never seen them. Had not papa visited them that day while she waited at the hotel?

'There is something which I feel I ought to tell you,' he said meditatively and sadly. 'In one small matter, I wronged your mother, very cruelly. I have bitterly regretted it since.'

'She loved you so much, papa.'

'I only discovered it through these people—they are dead and gone you know. I confess it came as a great surprise to me. Vi. Your mother belonged to an extremely good family.'

'Oh,' said Vi.

'I wronged her, in that respect. They had a quantity of papers—records which they assured me contained conclusive proof that they were connected with some of the very best families in England. And it only shows how careful one ought to be in such matters. Your mother never thought of such things, poor soul. And so it was—observing the mere externals—manner and all that—of those members of the family whom I had seen—I wronged her—very cruelly.'

Vi could not say anything.

'But this you should know Vi. You come of good stock on *both* sides.'

He dwelt upon this glorious thought for a minute or two, and suggested that Vi would do wisely to call it to mind at any time when vulgarians—in her 'place of business' for instance—were disrespectful.

'On *both* sides Vi. . . . Always remember that. By *birth*, the equal of any woman in the three kingdoms.'

Those scoundrels of solicitors—he added—Messrs. Clifford, Atkinson and George, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, had impudently detained these important documents pending the settlement of some disputed charges incurred—as they alleged—ere he removed his patronage from their firm.

'Rascals! I ought to have taken the matter into court. But remember what I tell you: the papers are there. It is quite possible that they might consent to deliver them to *you* Vi, although, out of pique and revenge, they won't to me. It might be worth trying. But we will talk of this on some future occasion.'

They had come nearly to the end of the new houses, and here Colonel Shelton looked at his watch and then paused.

'Let us sit down for a few minutes,' and they went over to one of the benches beneath the leafless trees. 'Just for a few minutes while I look at my big brave daughter. . . .

'And you really make a good thing out of your shop.' He still winced at the word. 'I see how smart—how really charmingly dressed you are. They pay you well?'

Vivien had feared that it would be impossible to work round again to the darker side of her shop career: the money difficulty; but, with the way thus unexpectedly laid open, she plunged at it desperately.

Papa's face grew gloomy.

'Oh, my poor Vi. A pound a week. Oh, iniquitous! But this is only the beginning. Things will improve. Meantime, I must indeed help you along.'

'If you *could*, papa.'

'Listen, Vi. I am always embarrassed—more so than ever now. Yet, at the moment, I am not without funds. I will do what I can, but you mustn't expect miracles. Now suppose—suppose I allowed you another pound a week.'

'*Papa!*'

She had sprung to her feet and was looking down at him with a flushed and radiant face.

'Papa. Could you really and *truly* afford all that?'

'I *will* afford it Vi,' and he took her hand and drew her down on to the seat beside him. 'My good, good Vi. Your pleasure gives me real pleasure.' And indeed he seemed really pleased.

'Thirteen pounds a quarter. And you shall have your first quarter *now*.' He had unbuttoned his dark grey overcoat and was bringing out his dainty Russia leather pocket-book.

'That will carry us on to March. Here dear,' and he gave her two five-pound notes and then put the book away and produced his gold sovereign purse. 'Three pounds!'

She could not speak. This great wonder had come to pass. That other fabulous weekly pound was hers. The shadow had lifted and she was standing in the full sunlight.

But papa was growing fidgety. He rose and looked about him and then began to walk on again, while his remarks became more jerky than hitherto.

'Good Vi! On the regular quarter days, eh? But you must remind me—write to me—not to Berkeley Street. And never come there again.' He was looking about him, and no longer at his daughter. 'I am leaving. My domestic arrangements are in a—transition stage. That woman—Page—has given me a lot of trouble. Yes. You must jog my memory if I forget. Better write to me—at the club. Yes. But never come there yourself. You wouldn't do a silly thing like that, would you Vi? No. That would be a dreadful solecism.'

And he suddenly held up his umbrella, straight and stiff in the air, and stopping, stood facing Vivien with the umbrella in this odd position.

'What is it, papa?' Vivien asked in surprise.

It was a cab, and as soon as it had drawn up by the pavement behind her, papa entered it and told the cabman to drive him to his club.

'Not in your way eh? I can't give you a lift then. Goodbye my dear,' and papa was gone.

The wonderful unexpected thing had happened. Papa—illusive, mysterious cloud-figure though he might be—had for once become gloriously solid, and with golden knife had cut all her entanglements. Wisely, she determined to enjoy her happiness without analysis—to be grateful without thought. Henceforth she would think only of papa in those moments on the bench beneath the bare plane-tree, with the kindly light shining out upon her from a softened mask, and the open, munificent hand loading her with such unbelievable largesse. Of the mystery behind the mask, of all that was dark and inexplicable in what she had seen with her too observant eyes, guessed at or recoiled from in her too active imagination, she would in no circumstances think of again. She wrote at once to Mrs. Maitland, telling of her great prosperity and of her great delight in being able to return those ten pounds without which she never, never could have achieved success. 'I don't know *what* would have happened to me if you had not so generously

given me this money in the beginning. *Now* I am so well off that I shan't know what to do with all my money.'

But Mrs. Maitland was it seemed in much the same sort of predicament. As she explained when returning the money, she certainly would not know what to do with it—at Bude. She was happy at Bude in the house of a kind relative, and Vivien must come and spend the summer holidays with her in this little seaside town. She had said this in all her letters.

'I will not pretend,' she now said, 'it is quite the retreat I had built in dreams for my old age. Do you remember—the house among the orange trees, with my girls about me? But do we ever realise our dreams here below? Please do not allow Colonel Shelton to distress himself about that old account.'

And then came swift sadness.

'I think my pet I ought to tell you the doctor here appears to take not too hopeful a view of my poor old heart. One thing you may be always sure of, my dearest Vi, that as long as it does beat it will hold you in it—in a large, large place. And we will remember this: In my experience I have known doctors often wrong.'

Oh how long would the dear old heart continue to beat? In her attic, lying awake at night, Vivien could hear it beating—now dangerously fast, now fatally slow. She had such red eyes next day that even in the dark basement their redness was detected by Miss Crofts. Half her new-found happiness was gone.

Nevertheless she was happy in being able to smooth some lines from Marian's face by another loan of three pounds. And she was glad to be able to send a present of twenty shillings to Mrs. Page for the sake of auld lang syne. She begged grey-haired, dirty, sorrowful Mrs. Page not to acknowledge the receipt of this small gift. She was very glad to be able to send it; but Mrs. Page and her distress were among the things that she never wanted to think of again.

For Mrs. Maitland she purchased a present in the form of a watered silk sachet, and made it more completely a watered silk ere she despatched it. She used two handkerchiefs as well as a pen and ink in writing the letter which accompanied it.

'I say pooh to your doctor. Although my experience is so much less than yours, I know that doctors are *always* wrong. Dr. Merton knew simply nothing about girls, although you used to say he was supposed to be clever at boys. And Miss Bauermann always said his partner was not fit to clean the steps of the Leipzig School of Medicine.'

She was 'easy in her circumstances'—as easy as though she had guessed the number of Bank Holiday passengers. She had nothing now to trouble her, as she often told herself: except her sorrow and fear about poor Maitey. She could afford to take life comfortably. Mrs. Moriarty's estimate had been accepted and Aunt Burnett's old black silk was now a grand new evening dress—and yet she was not as happy as she should have been.

In the midst of her prosperity the lurking spirit of sudden sadness came forth and pounced upon her day after day. When she was walking with Clara and Marian, or riding proudly on the tops of omnibuses, it would seize her by her ermine-wrapped throat and stifle her voice, striking her silent in the middle of a sentence, and ordering her to *think* and not to talk. Unexpectedly, in laughter and in sunshine, in the lamplight or the dusk—at odd and incongruous moments, it pounced. Once, with pardonable pride, she had pointed out the stern, dark, marble front of Colonel Shelton's club-house. Clara had been profoundly impressed, but Vivien had hurried on full of nervous misgiving lest her father himself might emerge from the grim portal and catch her in the act of committing what seemed dangerously like a solecism. It was not however the colonel, but the sad enveloping spirit that swung the blue doors and came out into Pall Mall.

Then she obeyed the order and had to think. She was but a solitary ant in the great ant-heap—quite alone in the labyrinth, and not really wanted by anybody. They were kind, nearly everybody, but all could do without her—even Marian and Mrs. Maitland. Thus she walked on silent, in the grip of the lurking spirit of the mighty town.

'What *are* you thinking about, Vivien? I am trying to tell you Mrs. Goff's latest and you won't attend.'

Vivien shivered beneath her ermine.

As if the spirit were not bad enough, Clara, with her little parrot tongue, was able to rouse that other dread presence, the vaguely gigantic towering figure.

'See,' said Clara, one evening. 'Just stand still and watch the cabs and you'll see for yourself what I told you was true.'

They were about to cross the Fulham Road, on their way to a prodigal's feast at the Mentone Restaurant, where Marian was to join them. As the hansom cabs, one after another, rattled eastward, Vivien saw in the lamplight the dreadful painted faces, and understood. It was the horrible nightly procession which

Clara had described. It was the shameful eastward flight of these night-birds, along the beaten track of shame towards the shameful centre of the town. From their horrible nesting-places —such as Berkeley Street—near and far, the night-birds were converging on the well-worn eastern track through the darkness. And as she saw the rolling cabs, understanding, following them, in morbidly rapid imagination tracing out the next few hours of the long night-smile of the painted faces, the grisly horror of life itself loomed gigantically above her head.

Her father, white-haired, hollow-templed; the rank perfume, the blowsy good-nature of the woman who lived opposite; the shame and the cruelty and the ugliness of life—she had to go on thinking, to open every mental door that she had struggled to bar, and enter in and *think*. And as she walked on in the lamplight with her sprightly comrade, she could only give those automatic responses which were absolutely necessary.

The dreadful laws of nature: cruelty and suffering, unceasing, unending—the selfish, world-wide struggle which papa had lightly sketched, which Mr. Darwin had heavily confirmed—the frightful destruction, the sacrifice of everything for self—so many to be destroyed, so few to be preserved. While the morbid horror lasted she thought of every smallest painful torturing thing that in all her days she had ever heard of.

Then, as such dark fits of thought-sickness passed off, there gradually rose some kinder ghost of her early reading—the philosopher's theory of negatives. One must be content to accept the consolation of negatives: to wander on through the boundless grotto like a shadow, nor wish for substance. If not with love: be happy in the absence of hate. Be sure you are happy, and be *very* grateful so long as fate is giving you its one and only gift—the respite from pain. But in the moment of achieved tranquillity she would hastily summon her dream-prince to calm and soothe her—after all the sad reasoned thought, she wilfully threw herself back into the foolish baby-girl fancy. And he came now unfailingly—on the omnibuses; in the throng of people outside the pit of a theatre; or, here, in the chattering warmth at the Mentone dinner-table.

'Oh, *do* be kind to me, and comfort me and console me. Oh my prince, my prince, these are dreadful tales that I hear of your "goings-on." They are so bad that a little bird tells me they have to be printed in Latin. Do you know what will happen unless I hear better reports of you? I shall have to dismiss you—in disgrace. And then what shall I do? Waking or dreaming, I shall be quite alone.'

XIII

THE spring had come at last. As Vivien hurried to the shop on her early mornings, the magic touch of the unseen hand was at its kindly work. The red brickwork was orange colour, and the shadows of the clouds on the white wood balconies were alive and tremulous. The spring flowers in the street sellers' baskets told her the progress of the year: snowdrops, daffodils, violets, primroses. At the smart flower-shop in Sloane Street, seasons were disregarded: the roses and the lilies bloomed for the rich all the year round; behind the plate-glass the lilac had long been over, and they were prematurely snatching the harvest of summer. As she looked in through the window she sometimes thought of Mr. Stanford. He had never written to reproach her for not replying to his kind letter.

On the sunny western pavement above Lennox Gardens, the man with the two sticks and the invisible strings to his heels was nearly always pacing to and fro to smile at her as she passed.

At the blouse-shop the new season's goods made a noble show, and seemed to Mrs. Wardrop not unworthy of this epoch-marking year. Already the customers' talk ran upon the coming glories of this Diamond Jubilee, as it seemed it was to be called. The aged sovereign lady of the realm was to take her second ride of thanksgiving through the long miles of the London streets—through the throbbing music of the myriad hearts. It was improbable that she would make this Imperial progress in a blouse. Nor would her female subjects consider the stop-gap of their wardrobe adequate for so solemn an occasion. But before and afterwards they would come, greedy and clamouring. There would be colonial cousins, representative customers from the farthest dependency, foreign ambassadorial customers from the smallest state in Europe, independent free-lance customers from the great Western Republic; and all might be expected to wait upon Mrs. Wardrop.

'It is going to be the biggest thing the world has ever seen,' said Mr. Pritchard, of Brent and Cooper's. 'You can't overdo it. Now or never, I do say, is the time to let fly and go a perisher,'

and he ran backwards and forwards between the bureau and his brougham.

'Thanks,' said Mrs. Wardrop, 'we 've heard that tale before.' Then, when the little man had driven off: 'Still there 's no mistake it *is* a boom this time.'

Yet upstairs—in spite of the boom—things were plainly going from bad to worse with poor Amabelle the skirtmaker. No sign of distress on the first floor escaped the keen eye of Mrs. Wardrop. 'There goes another notice from the electric light company. I daresay she can be civil enough to a dun. But it 's too late for soft sawder now, my lady. Never mind! They 'll be able to do all the business they 're likely to have—in the dark.'

It shocked Vivien to observe that in the presence of so much suffering, Mrs. Wardrop nourished unabated rancour. Poor souls! Any one might pity them, so silent and so dignified as they came and went to their empty show-room—but not Mrs. Wardrop.

'Shut the passage-door, Miss Crofts. They look half starved. If they smell our lunch cooking, they won't be able to attend to business.'

What could one do? Only look unutterable things at Mrs. Wardrop brutally laughing. It took away one's appetite. Mrs. Barrett, the cook, declared that they really went without food upstairs 'the whole livelong day.'

But at last there came the cry of despair from the first floor. Capitulation, surrender, all baleful pride gone. Amabelle on her knees at last. A letter from Mrs. Carey, delivered by the white-faced daughter, saying in effect: 'Have mercy and send me custom. I will give you half of anything I get. Pray, pray, help me.'

'Now, that 's what I call talking,' said Mrs. Wardrop, giving the table a bang. And that very afternoon she sent Mrs. Carey a customer.

'If you are in a hurry, there 's a woman upstairs who is quite competent,' said Mrs. Wardrop, drawling. 'Yes, on the first floor—you will be quite safe in her hands. Say I sent you.'

Alas, poor doomed Amabelle! Nothing could save her now. Though Mrs. Wardrop, mollified and drawling, might send her half a dozen skirt-seekers in an afternoon, the dismal closing scene of Amabelle's commercial drama was already being set upon the stage of destiny.

Vivien, doing her work and thinking of all this, sat in judgment on Mrs. Wardrop and found her wanting in every endearing attribute—generosity, pity, sympathy: not in the least a

good sort, but a monstrous stinge with a heart of stone. Yet the very next day Vivien was sorry that she had forgotten her wise resolution and ascended the judgment-seat again. The heart was not all stone; that broad bosom held *some* human feeling. Going to the bureau to ask for a customer's address, she found Mrs. Wardrop in tears. Her florid face was distorted by grief; the broad strong vulgar mask of every day was gone. Here was a strange new face of secret woe.

'Miss Shelton, this is a cruel world,' she sobbed, as she folded a letter that she had been reading. 'Sometimes I'm almost inclined to commit suicide.'

Vivien laid her hand upon the big quivering shoulder.

'Don't mind me,' sobbed Mrs. Wardrop. 'Miss Shelton—you're a kind—good—girl. There,' and she wiped her eyes. 'What is it? What is it you wanted?'

A few minutes later, Mrs. Wardrop was attending to a customer with her very grandest manner. What was Mrs. Wardrop—the real Mrs. Wardrop—behind her mask?

'Do I think Mrs. Wardrop has some secret, private cause of sorrow?' said Clara. 'I *know* she has. But you mustn't ask me anything about it.'

Vivien did not ask Clara to betray her confidence. But she thought more and more of the mystery that every outward shape carries hidden deep within. She would never judge again: she would only wonder and wait. What were they all behind their masks—Miss Inman behind her sleepy mask, Clara behind her laughing mask, even dear Marian behind her patient mask—and all these other less-known girls behind their masks? How little one could guess even of the most familiar.

One thing, as the year grew older, she came to understand clearly. Hidden in all the lives about her there was love. As Marian had said, you might not detect it at first; but it was certainly there. Without it, they would be miserable. No latchkey-independence, or brave girl-comradeship with other working girls, living like men-students in some humble continental university, no ease of wicker chairs or solace of books, no friendly girl-gatherings, or chattering restaurant dinners could really satisfy them unless they also had that hidden mystery which each could share with none. As they bustled to their work, or sauntered homeward, there fell by the shadow of each another imperceptible shadow of an invisible man.

Up and down her Social Ladder, from one end of Marefield Street to the other, love, as Marian said, was the hidden mainspring of the lodgers' lives. The invisible shadows fell upon the pavement before the shoppies' hurrying feet throughout the

week, and solidified and rang the bells on Sunday as Vivien had observed for herself. Certainly the poor shoppies, though miserable without it, were not all happy in their love. Once Marefield Street had slowly awakened on a Sunday morning to a tragedy in one of the houses at its lower end. A girl from the glove department of Veal's had poisoned herself. There was a curious crowd outside the house all the afternoon, and the shoppies in their mimic millinery clung to their young men's arms and shuddered as they passed by. Mrs. Kearsley would not understand that Vivien was not as greedy for all the particulars as she was herself. She brought in a newspaper and insisted on imparting a full account of the inquest. There had been harsh words from the shopman-sweetheart of the miserable girl. Other girls at Veal's had overheard his merciless tongue dealing blow after blow as she cowered and cried for mercy: sending her to her death as surely as though he had been using a knife to stab her. The jury expressed regret, and the coroner said the young fellow ought to be ashamed of himself. But 'throughout the coroner's censure, he preserved a stolid demeanour.' Are men ever ashamed of themselves? Mrs. Kearsley doubted it.

However, Mrs. Wardrop, middle-aged and stout, could not, at her time of life, be caused to sob and talk of suicide by unrequited love.

Gradually, as she thought of these matters, Vivien built up her own theory or love-creed, piecing it together from the materials nearest at hand, building it up into a perfect whole much as she had built her walking costume.

Doubtless if it came to one, as it were, to order, in obedience to one's own command, love could set the world to music, could turn the dull grey light of life to the rose tint of a dream. If it did not come like that it was not worth having. It was infinitely worse than not worth having: it was thought-sickness to think of. But if it came as in a dream, as in a dream one should give oneself to it—absolutely.

This was the artless faith of which she delivered herself one night at a little reception given by those two most talented girls, Miss Brierley and Miss Monroe, in Malplaquet Buildings.

The suites in these Malplaquet Buildings were sixty-two in number, but at the porter's office there was always a waiting list of fifty applicants at the least. The rents ranged from eight to thirteen shillings a week. Each suite consisted of bedroom, sitting-room, and kitchen, 'self-contained,' with hall-door on the stone staircase, and was let unfurnished on a weekly tenancy. The two clever young ladies lived on the top floor of Block B.

They could turn their hands to anything; they knew all modern languages, typewriting and shorthand; they even wrote for the newspapers; and, by joining forces, they had attained this great luxury—the paradise of two rooms. It was something like this, Vivien often thought, that she and Marian might perhaps have achieved in course of time had they gone into partnership.

In two corners of the small room were little writing-desks, with a shelf above each holding the books which these young authors used for reference in their literary labours. There was a Japanese chest of drawers twelve inches high; a Chinese sexagonal waste-paper basket; ferns in china pots; a tiny Swiss clock hanging on the wall, with a long trailing pendulum. On the mantelpiece were china and wooden animals, miniature photographs of our famous generals and illustrious actor-managers, and a patience pack; on the walls, large photographs, sacred and mundane, a Madonna and a hospital nurse, a lady in court dress, a horse-shoe painted brown, water-colour sketches, framed and unframed. In another corner was a hockey stick lurking behind the type-writing machine—work and play! On a bamboo table stood a fine yellow tulip in full bloom. The pot was surrounded with yellow crinkly paper. There were three wicker armchairs with loose red cushions, and on every ledge and shelf and vacant seat lay books and magazines and ladies' newspapers. It was a charming and most luxurious interior.

There was a sufficiency of conversation and refreshments at the little party—negus and criticism, rusks and metaphysics. Among the guests were Marian, and the girl from the tea-shop, and three or four profoundly clever girls: almost, if not quite, as talented as Miss Brierley and Miss Monroe. Marian did not venture to join in the conversation, and the tea-shop girl only giggled amiably and showed her pretty white teeth. Vivien, although feeling shy in such brilliant company, was keenly anxious to talk and if possible to shine; but somehow or other she felt at sea and that the good talk was blowing far above her head.

They talked of books, but not of *her* books. And all the authors' names were new and strange. When, once, she spoke of Dickens and Thackeray, they smiled at her as to a child who was babbling of baby ailments—colic and nettle-rash. Even Darwin, when mentioned, was but chicken-pox. Mill and Herbert Spencer were only hooping-cough and scarlatina. They had got over all that sort of thing long ago: in literature they were now grown-up. Nobody anybody had ever heard of was any

good. It was only by degrees that Vivien understood this gloomy fact—realising, that they were talking of authors' authors, not readers' authors—and then she sat silent, feeling very small indeed.

But gradually the talk of these so clever girls drifted on until the topic was love. A miraculously brilliant novel had been written by somebody personally known to one of them:—a most subtle, heart-searching fable of a girl and a man who had held the world well lost for love. It was the man who had demanded the sacrifice, and the girl who had made it. In one scale she had weighed the universe and in the other her own great yearning, and in an instant the wide world kicked the beam. Miss Monroe thought this Semele of the fiction *so* wise; Miss Brierley had her doubts; and, quite instinctively, all now seemed to turn to the girl from the tea-shop.

But the tea-shop girl only giggled.

Then Vivien's chance came.

'What do *you* think Miss Shelton?'

A woman's love, Miss Shelton thought, quoting Bauermann, should be the crown of a woman's life. She felt very shy, like some one called upon in a talking game to talk fine or pay forfeit. She worked in a certain amount of Bauermann and as many sonorous phrases from Memory's rag-bag as she could in her haste fish out. But behind the fine talk she was entirely sincere.

When the crown of life was offered, there must be no playing of Cromwell. It would be madness to refuse the crown. It would be dreadful to mistake some pinchbeck tinsel stage-property for the real diadem, but she did not think you could make such a blunder. You would not trust your eyes: you would be looking at it through the open windows of the heart. When your chance came you would not indeed think, weigh consequences or calculate cost, but would just grasp it as in a dream of rapture. She felt quite sure that the lady of the fiction had done well.

And then Miss Shelton drank avidly of lemonade in her great nervousness after her effort in the game.

They all seemed to think that she had acquitted herself handsomely—especially Marian who, quite literally, patted her on the back.

Miss Brierley was most condescendingly flattering as she offered Vivien some sweet biscuits to nibble with the lemonade. She affected even to detect in Vivien's remarks the germ of a literary instinct; and promised on some future occasion to introduce her guest to the editor of a ladies' newspaper. Thus,

with more compliments and cakes, the happy evening came to an end.

Two or three times during this happy youth of the year of Jubilee she saw in the flesh the prince of her silly daydreams.

There was a wonderful free library in South Audley Street which Clara, haunting the home and haunts of Aristocracy, had discovered by chance. Here on the estate of the model landlord of London, great changes were in progress. Shabby old houses were disappearing, and red-brick, stone-dressed flats and mansions were taking their place: the noble estate was being developed wisely and well. Everything marked the liberal policy and generous hand of the ducal owner—widened roadway, open spaces: light and air freely, lavishly dedicated to the use of the public. It all made one think of Lord Eaglesham and his oppressive rule. But the club-like, restful library was the kindest gift of the noble hand. Here, when—as sometimes happened—they were free of engagements, Vivien and Clara would come of an evening as to their own club, and read those men's papers in which Mrs. Wardrop never advertised and which in consequence never found their way into the shop.

Once, returning from a visit to Clara's library, they met him face to face. They were going through the old palace into St. James's Park. The two girls loved this short cut beneath the archway and through the inner court, and had thought themselves greatly daring when first they had ventured to attempt it. Vivien loved the darkness and mystery of the ancient palace by night: the gloom and grandeur of the low buildings, a half-seen cloister, the twinkle of a lamp above a narrow stone-framed door; the sentry in his black coat and monstrous bearskin, throwing a most monstrous shadow as he seemed to emerge from one of the massive walls; and—when she looked back—above the old roofs and chimneys, white clouds flying in a windy moonlit sky. It was all like a scene on the stage, she thought—scene one of another *Hamlet*.

Then, in the moonlit road beneath the great wall of Stafford House, Clara gave a spasmodic clutch and whispered his name—'Look! Helensburgh!' He passed them like a splendid, preoccupied ghost, so close that they could have touched him with their hands. He was not in uniform: his long coat was open and his shirt-front flashed white. In a moment the dark palace had absorbed him and he was gone. He was no doubt going to dine with some princely inmate, or at the mess of one of those sumptuous corps whose names Clara knew by heart—the Gentleman-Ushers, the Nobles-Guard, the Royal Arquebusiers,

the Queen's Cross-bowmen, or what not wonderful and fantastically gorgeous.

They walked through the park beneath the whispering trees in a spell-bound silence. They had passed the long front of the other palace and were in the unromantic streets again, before Clara said with a little sigh:

'To see him in the moonlight like that, all by himself, no one could believe the things that Mrs. Goff says about him.'

Another time she was alone—without even Clara to distract one's attention by gasping whispers.

That haughty and troublesome customer, Lady Augusta Lidstone, had been causing trouble on the telephone. 'Yes, yes, *I* am Mrs. Wardrop. . . . What is it? . . . Who are you? . . . Yes, yes, I will keep my promise. . . . You shall have it without fail. . . . You have no grounds for saying that. . . . Be that as it may, you shall not be disappointed this time.'

'Confound it all,' cried Mrs. Wardrop, having angrily rung the bell and hooked up the receiver in disgust. 'For two pins, I 'd have told her to take her custom somewhere else.'

But of course one could not afford to offend a Lady Augusta. The new blouse, which had been 'corrected' by Miss Crofts to suit her ladyship's troublesome whims and fancies, was hastily packed; and Mrs. Wardrop called for a volunteer to carry it to Cleveland Row in a cab. Miss Shelton, longing for this unexpected little treat, instantly offered her services and was at once despatched on her errand with two other cardboard boxes —urgent cases also—to be sent by passenger train from Victoria.

It was a beautiful May morning, and the streets were all gaiety and brightness. It was delightful to be rolling through the open air instead of tramping the dusty prison of the shop; and Vi wished that the drive could last all day. From Victoria her cabman laid his course through St. James's Park; but no sooner were they among the planes and the elms than the cab was involved in a slow stream of traffic and taken in charge by the police. A Levée was about to be held at St. James's Palace, and in a moment she was in the midst of a world of uniformed men: white-haired old sailors; sunburnt young soldiers; turbaned orientals; sombre, foolish-looking civilians, ill at ease in military costume; astonishing old judges and barristers in wigs—patiently waiting in the slowly advancing cabs and broughams on each side of her. Oh what a pity Clara could not be here to enjoy such profuse gape-seed also! Leaning forward, with her hands clasped upon the big cardboard box,

Vivien watched it all with childishly entranced eyes, absorbing and recording every detail of the show—the solemn and yet foolish courtiers in their absurd clothes; the mounted police trotting to and fro; the sternness of the unmounted police as they pushed back any encroaching cabhorse; the silent spectators; workmen away for their dinner-hour, pipes in mouth watching and wondering; and in the cab next to hers, a young guardsman nursing his bearskin on his knees—a schoolboy warrior in a uniform only just out of the tailor's tissue-paper as she guessed, with a white patch of forehead where the sunburn ended, blue-eyed and flaxen-pated and grinning—giving her a friendly juvenile grin of sympathy because she seemed so excited —really a lamb of a baby-grenadier.

Then, as they drew nearer to the palace, passing the low-walled gardens where the lilacs and laburnums were in bloom, the scene became dreamlike in its beauty. It was no longer London but fairyland. Soldiers and still more soldiers, the bobbing bearskins and the fluttering plumes red and white, silver breast-plates and golden trappings, the incredible pomp of the state trumpeters, the shining coats of the satin-skinned horses—the colour and the glory of it dazed one. The sunlight danced and music filled the air. It really was like a dream.

And there in a moment, without surprise, as though unconsciously she had been all the time expecting it, she saw him, sitting in all his glory, enthroned upon his black pawing charger, the heart and centre of the flashing pageant—her ineffably splendid dream-prince. He had clattered up to a little body of his sumptuous supporters as they waited under the plane-trees, and was issuing orders—telling the men to blow their silver trumpets, telling the plane-trees to swing their branches in time to the fanfare, telling the bright May sunshine to shine more brightly.

Lady Augusta Lidstone in her littered bedroom at the top of the queer old house in Cleveland Row, smoking a cigarette and blinking at the sunlight as it poured in upon her through the low window, looked rather like a wreck upon Society's treacherous shore. It was the untidiest room that Vivien had ever seen. There were men's signed photographs—dozens of them—packs of cards, a mandoline, fencing-sticks, French novels, cigarette ends, tennis rackets, a chest expander, a bicycle lamp, dog-whips, riding-whips, torn envelopes and crumpled letters—the jetsam and flotsam of an aimless life—the stale débris of a land-locked sea, not the fine fragments on an ocean-washed coast.

But her ladyship at home seemed amiable and friendly rather than haughty and severe as when visiting the shop.

'That's right. It *is* so kind of you. I thought that pig of a woman meant to play me false. She *is* a pig, isn't she? You'll stay of course while I try it on?'

Vivien, glancing at the photographs, wondered if his portrait was among them. This noble customer might know him well perhaps. Or Mr. Stanford's portrait? She did not dare to examine the collection while Lady Augusta, aided by her maid, pulled off her bodice.

She was a big girl, as tall as Vivien herself; but she was more solid. She was handsome in a strong, bold way; but there were dark rims round her large eyes; and, standing in the sunlight, she looked more haggard and careworn than the cherished thirty-year-old daughter of any well-to-do earl and countess ought to look. But her naked arms were tremendous: they reminded Vivien of a picture of a prize-fighter that she had seen in an illustrated paper at the South Audley Street library.

'It's awfully good of you to have brought it. I don't know how to thank you enough,' said Lady Augusta, stretching her bare arms. 'I did really want it. I'm going away for the week-end. I do hope they haven't botched it in changing the lace,' and she scrutinised the delicate garment as her maid held it up.

Vivien's too-observant eyes had been riveted by the queer spots upon Lady Augusta's big left shoulder. They were angry little red spots, with tiny discoloured patches on the smooth, white skin; and, considered in conjunction with Lady Augusta's facial expression of weariness or languor, they appeared indicative of danger. Vivien, after so much friendly feeling had been shown her, did not feel justified in ignoring their existence.

'Do you know,' she said shyly. 'I hardly like to tell you, but those red spots—so many of them—I've seen them once before, on a girl at school—and I am really afraid you are sickening for measles. Don't you think you ought to show them to a doctor?'

But this was the last thing in the world which Lady Augusta desired to do. She had suddenly flushed and then turned pale and cold and haughty—and, with all friendliness gone, was the Lady Augusta of Clara's description: looking, or endeavouring to look, at one as though one were dirt beneath her feet.

'Oh all right,' said Vivien, disgusted with her ladyship's vanity or folly in taking a friendly hint so badly. 'I am sure I don't know why you should be angry. There's nothing to be ashamed

of in measles—and, really and truly, I think you ought to be careful.'

But now her ladyship's pale cheeks turned more pale than ever, and her strong eyes suddenly drooped, as though something in the blouse young lady's unabashed gaze had daunted her. With very few words she begged Miss Shelton not to worry about the health of her customers, and dismissed her—not rudely, but very coldly.

Her ladyship's maid, conducting Vivien downstairs through the queer old house, looked at her with a very queer expression.

XIV

HER papa had completely forgotten her. Relying on her income as surely as though it had been derived from Clara's yellow-covered journal, she had conducted her life in a careless spendthrift manner: making no hoard, laying up no store for the future. By the middle of May she was compelled to jog papa's memory. 'I have been somewhat harassed of late,' wrote Colonel Shelton, enclosing fifty shillings in postal orders. 'On account of current quarter, balance to follow. I confess I had forgotten. Quite right to remind.—R. S.' The postal orders had been bought at the office in the King's Road, Chelsea. Then he had not left Mrs. Page's? The reason why he had refrained from making his little incognito visit was not, therefore, because he now resided at a distance.

With a mind relieved of bankrupt fears, confirmed again in the security of her ample means, she threw herself into all the joys that her life offered. Now and then sad thoughts came—Mrs. Maitland—papa's domestic arrangements; the cruelty of the world as exhibited in its treatment of that poor Mrs. Carey and her daughter; the sufferings of over-driven, over-laden horses as seen in Marefield Street, which, though apparently so obscure and out of the way, was a favourite short-cut for East and West traffic—but she was ashamed of herself sometimes for finding how little such thoughts marred her own pleasures. They came like clouds in the sunny skies of these early summer days: a momentary shadow and then the full sunshine again. She was really happy in her work and in her play: happier, she told herself, than she had ever been since Bloomsbury and childhood.

Already there was bustle and excitement in the air, and the moving panorama of the streets was full of the prelude to the coming jubilee. The red liveries on royal carriages flashed to and fro; foreigners with guide-books sauntered gaping; country people, bumped and jostled and out of breath, climbed the omnibus stairs only to find that they had stopped the wrong omnibus and to clamber down again in blushing countrified shame; the route of the procession was already a long timber-

yard; papa's was among the earliest of the splendid club-houses to encase itself in a wooden sheath, as though about to be packed up and put away in a safe place by all the careful members lest the vulgar multitude might injure it.

During this time of excitement and prodigality Vivien and her friends had many amusements—theatres, museums, the exhibition, etc.; but beyond and above all normal sources they suddenly tapped a generous river of rare and unexpected treats.

There was a dear old Indian soldier—a strange unheard-of Colonel Duncan—home on leave for the Jubilee. Properly speaking, he belonged to Miss Brierley. He knew Miss Brierley, and, apparently, he knew no other living soul in all the mighty labyrinth of London. Miss Brierley had no use for him herself; but the good and clever girl rightly felt that it would be a thousand pities to waste him, so she handed him on to Marian and the others. Immediately, instinctively, before he had given them one treat, Vivien felt that she was in the presence of one of the most perfect lambs that she had ever encountered.

In half an hour they seemed to have known him all their lives, or to have known him when they were children, and now to have recovered him after long years—the dear old bachelor uncle who had returned at last. He was blue-eyed and grey-haired and he had been fighting all his life, and now in his brief respite he wanted to make his nieces happy. This was what he seemed to say to them, looking at them with wistful, chivalrous compassion as though it irked him to think that any nieces, much less his, should be forced to work for their living.

He took them—Clara, Marian, and Vivien—on Sundays to Richmond and Hampton Court and Windsor. He gave them treat upon treat, feast after feast. He took them to the Tower and to the Zoo on Saturday afternoons. He showed them London as they had never seen it, and pretended all the time that he was selfishly showing it to himself. He would not, he could not have enjoyed all the sights without his dear girls' company.

He was Colonel Newcome; he was Pegotty; he was kind and lavish and brave and chivalrous; he was a fine, fine gentleman with the simplicity of a child and the dignity of a Knight-Templar. For these sufficient reasons the three girls loved him.

'Why haven't I married?' he said once when Clara was teasing him. 'Too busy, and not attractive enough. . . . Never loved anybody? Ah, that's quite another story, Miss Clara.'

They were returning from Hampton Court; and, as the train

carried them through orchards and meadows, they all urged him to tell them his love-story.

Yes there had been *one* lady in his life he confessed, after very little pressing, looking at their attentive faces with gravely enigmatic eyes. He had loved her, honoured her, always. There had been no one else—ever.

'What do you ask, Miss Marian? I have never told her of my love, you know. I have tried to *prove* it.'

'But she may not know.'

'Oh yes, she knows. She understands. She takes it for granted.'

And the dear old boy smiled: as they thought, with poignant sadness.

While he squeezed his bony, freckled hands in a contortion of suppressed delight, they questioned him with breathless sympathy.

'Yes—She is in England now. I have come home to see her.'

'Won't you tell her—after all this time?'

'No, Miss Vivien. I must not tell her.'

'Do,' said Vivien laying her hand upon his arm. 'Tell her. She may not know. It's dreadful to think that she may never have known.'

'Oh you dear Miss Vivien. It would be monstrous presumption if I acted on your advice. And she knows all right—knows that I am hers, body and soul; that it is sufficient reward to be allowed to serve her, fight for her, die for her.'

It was Vivien who first detected the imposture.

'*Marian!* Don't you see—Oh what a lamb! He is talking of—the *Queen*!'

At Windsor, he was enabled to show them the lady of his love. People had said she would go out driving before dusk, and they had waited by the castle gates. They, with the waiting crowd, had run from point to point under false alarms that she had come forth through some unexpected portal. Then the tidings had flown that there would be no drive to-day; and they had given up hope and gone for a walk through the park.

Then—in an empty road, through the dusk of the forest trees, through the dusk of the dying day, with the red sun sinking behind her in a cloudless purple sky—she came. The white dust rolled like little puffs of smoke as the grey horses came jogging towards them. One black-coated outrider on a blinkered grey horse—black-coated servants, grey horses—a deep-seated landau—two ladies—and the Queen. Vivien never could forget it: the incredibly modest, the unutterably majestic, little cortège;

upon them in a moment, in another moment gone; rolling away into the dusk beneath the trees, from the red light of the setting sun, with the white dust blowing like puffs of white smoke.

When she turned, Clara was speechless and open-mouthed, holding to the old colonel's arm with both hands as though in fear of swooning. The old soldier was bareheaded; and, as Vivien looked at his face, she understood clearly, plainly, that his joke was not all a joke. It was scarcely at all a jest; it was nearly all true. He was one of the hundreds of such loving servants who had come home this year from the far-off lands of their steadfast service, without thought of reward or care for personal notice,—uninvited guests to stand unseen in the multitude, swelling the music of the beating hearts as their Mistress swept by in the apotheosis of the glory they had made for her.

Vivien blew her nose again and again as she thought of it.

In all respects, throughout the flying weeks during which they had him with them, this dear old Colonel Duncan was as entirely nice as other people—Mrs. Goff for instance—were horrid.

Mrs. Goff was entirely horrid. The fairies had wickedly filled her with toads, and out of her blatant masculine mouth the toads came hopping. She left a toad or two in the shop whenever she visited it. Even Clara seemed to begin to harbour doubts of her Mrs. Goff.

'Once or twice she has said things I don't understand—but somehow I don't like them.'

Mrs. Wardrop was too busy to bother about Mrs. Goff or anybody else. Jubilee visitors were coming in a strong tide; twice already the red liveries had been to the door—'only suite'—as Mrs. Wardrop said, but once they were safe inside the door the royal carriage was a splendid advertisement. The press of business was so great that Mrs. Wardrop was engaging another blouse-girl—a fifth—'on appro.'

'What she says about all these foreign royalties fairly staggers one,' said Clara. 'I can't repeat it.'

'But Vivien,' Clara continued. 'She has told me one most extraordinary thing. You know that man who walks so funny—the one we meet? *Who* do you think he is? He is Mr. Arncliffe—*her* invalid husband.'

Mrs. Goff was quite sure of this. The Arncliffes' house was in Lennox Gardens. It could be no one else. He was dying by inches—paralysis. It might be a long time before the end came, but he could not escape his doom.

When Vivien next chanced to meet Mr. Arncliffe plodding laboriously to and fro, she could scarcely support his glance. She understood now the intolerable sadness of that smile of his. Slowly, methodically, bravely, but despairingly, he paced up and down the pavement on his narrow beat—like a mouse swimming in a pail—conveying now without need of words the intolerable sense of doom: 'Never more in this world of men and mice to run or leap again.'

Round the corner, in Lennox Gardens, at the door of his house, the carriage of the faithless wife was waiting. Soon she would come fluttering out in all her dragon-fly splendour and go darting away in the sunshine for her long day of baleful pleasure. 'At Sandown Mrs. Arncliffe was in great beauty in mauve and gold, etc. etc. etc.' She had chosen a blouse for Sandown two days ago, Vivien remembered. This wicked wife would drive away without one look backward towards the dying husband whom she was so grossly wronging. It was horrible to think of.

But that was Mrs. Goff's way: she always left one some poisonous food for thought.

One morning, about a week before the day of Jubilee, Mrs. Wardrop's fifth girl appeared. It was Miss Carey, come downstairs to serve 'on appro.' while her mother remained alone on the empty first floor in the silence of her commercial ruin.

Miss Carey, white-faced and pinched of mouth, went about the shop with downcast eyes and a forlorn, lifeless manner. She flushed faintly when spoken to, whether in sharp reprimand by Mrs. Wardrop or in kindly advice by her shopmates. The girls were very kind to her, but kindness seemed of no avail. Her thoughts no doubt were busy with the catastrophe of her life. Two years ago, as Mrs. Wardrop said, she and the widowed mother had been living like ladies on a ladylike competence; but thinking, forsooth, that they were just as clever as one or two of the brightest spirits of the age, they had plunged headlong to destruction in a brainless imitation of that which they were inherently incapable of really understanding—that is to say, of Mrs. Wardrop herself. Mrs. Wardrop bore no malice now. They had brought their pigs to a pretty market. Penniless, helpless, hopeless, the girl and her mother must forget that they had ever been ladies and find their own level among the myriad seekers for daily bread.

'Hardly an acquisition, Miss Clara,' said Mr. Pritchard of Brent and Cooper's, after critically observing the new girl. He

had, in spite of his many rebuffs, pluckily returned to the assault in his little brougham full of cardboard boxes; and, finding Mrs. Wardrop more urbane though no less obdurate, he was loitering in the front shop. And here he did the thing which Vivien had always dreaded. He called her 'Miss Vivien.'

'I say hardly up to *our* form, Miss Vivien. Your new young lady I mean. You'll have to brisk her up a bit, learn her how to stand straight up and look people in the face—use her eyes, if I may say so, same as you young ladies can.'

And indeed Vivien was standing up and using her eyes, flashing indignant lightning on the miserable, common, little wretch. But he did not understand. He had meant no harm: he was totally unconscious of his monstrous offence.

This morning Mr. Pritchard had something else for Miss Clara besides the usual buttonhole. A little time after he had gone, Clara produced three tickets for the upper boxes of a theatre, and begged Vivien and Marian to go with her that evening.

'What nonsense,' said Clara. 'It's no obligation to *him*. It's *me* you'll have to thank. Besides, they cost him nothing. You can see for yourself they're marked "complimentary." They're Trade compliments, nothing else. He says he can get as many as ever he wants—and all said and done, I don't see that he's such a bad little feller—in a way.'

Vivien, after resolutely refusing, discussed her decision with Marian at luncheon, and finally reversed it.

Since their association with their dear old colonel, the inexpressible vulgarity of Mr. Pritchard had filled her with increased horror. To take any benefit from those coarse hands—no matter how devious the channel of communication—seemed derogatory to one's pride. If one consented to avail oneself of his complimentary tickets, could one properly resent his complimentary mode of address? But Marian seemed baffled by the intricacy of this argument; and in her gentle, practical way, referred to the newspaper to discover what the piece might be. They had really been glutted with amusement of late. To her mind, the true point at issue was whether the piece was worth going to see or not.

It was a revival of a play called *Caste* by the late Mr. Robertson. Vivien was quite sure that she had heard poor Mrs. Maitland speak of it in terms of praise. Marian remembered that her father, the Rev. Draper, had often mentioned it. Certainly it was worth seeing.

The theatre was full, crowded with Jubilee visitors. There was excitement in the air; in a big box there were satin pro-

grammes and bouquets; royal personages were evidently expected; Vivien was very glad that she had come. They were well placed. Although at the side and so high up, they were in the very front row. Vivien had Marian next to her; beyond Marian sat Clara; and beyond Clara there was an empty seat. As soon as they had taken off their hats they could lean forward on their elbows and look down on the assembled company.

With eager watchful eyes they studied the waiting audience: the stalls with their rows of heads, black shoulders of men, white shoulders of women—the bright-coloured dresses in the midst of the black dress-clothes looking like flowers in a bed of black mould. There were some brilliant dresses beneath the rich opera-cloaks, but very few blouses worth considering. In the stalls, none at all; in the dress circle, a good many, but of no consequence; above that, nothing but blouses of the commonest description. But there was a grand coffee-jacket in a box, which they strongly suspected to have been issued by Mrs. Wardrop.

The music of the band, hidden away beneath the stage, was almost lost in the murmur of the voices, the rustling of programmes, the opening and shutting of doors: and over all the house the empty royal box seemed to spread a sense of awe and dignity.

But looking up suddenly Vivien found to her indescribable horror that the vacant place next to Clara had now been filled by Mr. Pritchard.

'It really is too bad of her,' she whispered.

'Yes—isn't it?' Marian whispered in meek resignation.

One was impotent to escape from the humiliating position. Caught in Clara's trap there was no way out. All one could do was totally to ignore Mr. Pritchard.

To do this when the curtain rose was quite easy—thanks to the late Mr. Robertson. As the charming little fable unrolled itself so facilely, so gracefully, with such a magical semblance of truth, Brent and Cooper and their favourite representative dropped into limitless space and were promptly lost in vacuous nothingness. Throughout the first act Vivien and Marian sat enraptured. Oh what a lamb was the late Mr. Robertson, what a wizard-king of all the wizards! They thrilled and quivered as the good mirth and the good sentiment came bubbling up from the kindly fountain. The heavy, heavy swell; the noble, noble lover; the struggling girls; and the wicked, but transportingly comic papa—they were all new, all true to the upper boxes. 'Kind hearts are more than coronets,' etc. Vivien's

eyes were filled with swift tears by the justice, the aptness, the nobility of the quotation.

Busily blowing her nose and dimly peering over her handkerchief when the curtain fell, she felt that never before had the stage glamour been so complete. She would not look towards Clara and their host, lest the charm should be broken. She would not turn even when Clara made a remark, calling attention to something, but sat silently gazing down into the auditorium.

The royal box was occupied now. The royal party had quietly entered the theatre during the act. There were two ladies, foreign princesses, so like our own princesses that one marvelled at the likeness; and with them were princes and nobles, and the one standing nearest to the stage was Lord Helensburgh. As the princesses looked about with royal inquiring eyes, or graciously smiling talked to the men, and while the royal presence seemed to permeate the whole audience with a subtly oppressive awe, she watched her dream-prince. There was no need for Clara to pull her arm. Had she thought at all about the empty box, she might have guessed that he would come to fill it. He was looking round the theatre, round and up, and then with careless unseeing eyes directly at the distant spot where she sat—so that instinctively she turned her eyes away for a moment. Now he had sat down and was talking to one of the royal visitors. He laughed and showed his teeth, and then lifted his gloved hand and hid his mouth. 'The Earl of 'Elensburgh,' Mr. Pritchard was saying. 'That's him all right—The Earl of 'Elensburgh sure enough. Told off to them, to act as Lord-in-waiting or something.' Her face flushed as Mr. Pritchard talked so loudly. She was seized with a childish fear lest *he* should look up in wonder, having heard his name on those vulgar lips. But he was too far off, of course, to see or to hear. He had lifted the white glove again; and this time Vivien was quite sure that he was hiding a yawn. And as he sat there, splendidly yawning in the effulgent face of royalty, he seemed to recede farther and farther away, until there grew an ever-widening gulf which even dreams could not bridge.

Suppose and suppose he were to make some excuse and leave the royal box, and by swinging doors and carpeted passages and then by steep stone stairs, come lightly springing to this upper circle, to where three shop-girls sat with flushed faces and nursed their hats on their knees—side by side with Mr. Pritchard. The dream became a nightmare. 'Any friend of theirs is a friend of mine, my lord. Take my seat while I go and stretch

my legs.' No. Suppose-and-suppose was losing its power. As she thought of her own foolishness, he seemed to recede: as though, like a child, she was looking at him through the wrong end of an opera-glass. As she thought for a moment of her place in the world and of his, the dream seemed to begin to fade and to die as if to-night in this crowded theatre it had received its death-stroke—from Mr. Pritchard. But she still watched him, her dream-prince, persistently, foolishly, yearningly, as receding he grew dimmer and dimmer, until at last he disappeared blotted out by moisture on the eyelashes.

Then once again the late Mr. Robertson held sway.

Once more she thrilled and quivered. But quite early in the act, she received a smart blow on the back from some hard object, and, looking round, in the subdued light had difficulty in understanding. It was Mr. Pritchard offering a hospitably opened box of chocolates. 'A present,' Clara whispered hoarsely. 'He's got a box for each of us.' Determined at once that for her part she would rather die than accept Mr. Pritchard's present, but unwilling to create a disturbance at the moment, Vivien made room for the little box with her hat upon her knees and haughtily turned to the stage, while already Marian was meekly sucking her sweetmeats.

Towards the end of the act, however, absorbed and thrilling, quite automatically, unconsciously stimulated by those sucking sounds of Marian, Vivien ate a chocolate; then another and another. She did not realise what she had done until the act-drop fell.

It was too annoying. One could not return a slightly-depleted box. Nothing remained but to thank Mr. Pritchard for his kind thought and friendly attention, and then to go on with the chocolates: eating the last bitter fragments of a foolish pride in all humbleness of spirit.

So Vivien, leaning forward and smiling, thanked Mr. Pritchard shyly but sincerely for his kindness. And Mr. Pritchard, with his common little face cheerfully smiling back at her, said 'Don't name it Miss Vivien.'

But when the play was over and the three girls had been safely conducted into the omnibus at Piccadilly Circus, and their host had brandished his silk hat in a last good-night from the crowded pavement, where all the dreadful night-birds of the town were hovering, Vivien turned upon Clara wrathfully.

'Clara, why did you not ask our permission before making your friend one of the party? Why did you suppress the fact that Mr. Pritchard was coming?'

'Because,' said Clara, from her corner in the omnibus, 'if I had told you, you wouldn't have come; and I wanted you to come.'

At last the never-to-be-forgotten day of Jubilee arrived. If Colonel Shelton had happened to be fortunate in the ballot for ladies' seats at his club, it had not occurred to him to send an invitation to the blouse-shop. But that other colonel, given to them by blind chance and far-seeing Miss Brierley, did not permit his adopted nieces to lose the great sight. Very early in the morning he escorted Marian and Vivien to the seats which he had procured on a stand in Fleet Street, and providing them assiduously with food, conversation, and gallant compliment, he caused the long hours of waiting to seem not the worst part of the treat. He would have liked to have Clara with him also; but Clara had made other arrangements and was to see the procession with Mr. Pritchard on the other side of the Thames.

Vivien, when the great show began with a few splendid soldiers of that sumptuous corps whose uniform she now knew so well, was irresistibly reminded of the progresses of the ostentatious nobleman of her youth who moved from town to town with his barebacked moors and his shuffling elephants. As in the old circus processions, the note of wonder was instantly struck, and then, in an ascending scale of glory, the pomp and majesty of the Empire unrolled itself until Britannia personified came into view.

It was the apotheosis of England's glory, an Imperial parade, an inconceivable display of the might and vastness of the realm, and Vivien was really overcome by emotion as she watched and thought of the inward meaning of it. Indelicate to the nations of the world, perhaps, in its splendid defiance, crushing in its unrolling, unending message of careless power and uncounted opulence of resource—a sight for English eyes and not for the gaze of foreigners: a stupendous sacred ceremony for which perhaps London should have been made a sacred city, sacred to the children of the Empire, into which no alien might enter.

What foe would dare to strike at England after this?

As the pride and the glory of it filled Vivien, and as, with the final wonder rolling nearer and nearer, her heart began to beat out its part in that street music which the aged Queen was said to be able to hear above the booming of guns, the rattle of the drums, the clangour of the trumpets, she and Marian like two children pressed closer and closer to their kind old soldier. As

their sovereign passed, Vivien, with hands clasped through the Colonel's arm, was leaning her cheek against the Colonel's shoulder, and on the other side of him Marian was seeking similar support. But this colonel of chance, this gentle transient shadow of the boundless grotto, did not reprove either of them for committing so flagrant a solecism. He was not now aware of their presence. Out of his brave steadfast eyes there was shining all the devotion of his long brave life.

Two days afterwards, he came to the shop and bade them good-bye. He pressed their hands and thanked them for being so good to him—a friendless stranger. He asked them to remember him and be good to him again if he ever came home again. He gave to each of them a gold bangle of Indian workmanship; and when, at parting, he said 'God bless you and guard you my dear Miss Vivien,' she suddenly thought of the old soldier at Greenwich, and wondered if all good soldiers said that.

Then, with a last squeeze of the hand for his nieces, and a deeply respectful bow to Mrs. Wardrop, he pushed the glass door and returned for ever to the shadowland from which chance and Miss Brierley had for a brief space brought him.

XV

MRS. MAITLAND was dead. Never again would Vivien see her kind old friend and protector. The ominous black-edged letter with the Bude postmark arrived in the middle of July. Her grief was very real and very deep, and for a time she could not speak of it even to Marian.

Marian had herself been fond of Mrs. Maitland, but she owed her no debt of gratitude; there had been no bond of confidence between them; and she was philosophic in expressing her regret.

'Don't grieve, Vi,' said Marian, 'poor dear, all her troubles are over now and perhaps she is happier than she has ever been.' Then, very soon, Marian went away for her holidays. Her blue eyes had for a long while been filled with anticipated joy. She was going to Harwich, to live in a little cottage with some friends, whose name she did not mention, but to whom she was obviously much attached. In the course of her visit she might even go to stay at Hamburg—of all places in the world! She had saved sufficient money to face a really long holiday.

The doom of holidays fell swiftly and heavily this year. Never before, it was said, had Mrs. Wardrop passed such heavy sentences.

'Five weeks, young ladies—and as much more as you care to take. And if some of you don't come back at all, I don't believe I shall miss you, for, upon my word and honour, that confounded Jubilee seems to have completely knocked the bottom out of this business.'

Five poundless weeks! It was worse than any one could have guessed.

Thus in the sweltering holiday weather Vivien was left very sad, very lonely—like the unfortunate London cats left in holiday time to amuse and sustain themselves as best they can. More unfortunate even than half the hard-up cats in this: they were black already, and hard-up Vivien had to buy a new black dress as a last mark of respect for her poor old friend.

Late one afternoon, returning from her lonely walk in the Park, Vivien came face to face with Mr. Stanford.

He was very glad to see her. He had been looking for her: had called at the shop, had called at Mrs. Kearsley's, and would have called there again in the course of the evening if this most fortunate encounter had not occurred to save him all further trouble. His tone was that of an old and trusted friend who, coming back from far-off lands, hastens to report himself to those dear to him in the home country.

He had wandered far—chiefly in search of health, he told her. He had gone to Greece on the completion of a brief and disastrous campaign delivered against the rulers at Monte Carlo; and, after his repulse from the impregnable rock, had endeavoured to live cheaply and innocently among the islands of the famous Archipelago. But here he had been very ill—about to imitate the poet Byron by dying in Greece—when friends on a yacht had found him quite by chance, taken him on board, and carried him with them still eastward to Constantinople and the Black Sea. He had been in the Holy Land, and some very *un*holy lands, he said. Then, leaving his friends, he had loitered homeward across the broad Continent, getting strong and well again; and now here he was at last, at home, but utterly alone, in this deserted London. He was sunburnt and friendly and smiling, only indirectly appealing for sympathy, making very little of his troubles, including that peril of an exile's grave; and Vivien found a sudden unexpected comfort in his presence as they walked side by side. A pleasant-toned voice; a cultivated accent; the make-believe, if not the solid fact, of a comrade in her almost intolerable loneliness, though only for a few minutes! He was improved, different, hardly, if at all, oppressive. And had he not purged his contempt in the matter of those foolish flowers by his long months of exile, by his decorous silence? Surely she could afford to indulge in the make-believe, to pretend to herself that she was really glad to see him.

'You have not forgotten your promise?' he said presently. 'You are going to be nice to me—we are going to be friends?'

With the question on his lips, instead of in her own thoughts, the sense of doubt returned in all its old strength. It was no good pretending. About the man there hung an atmosphere of oppression—a something vaguely repellent. She never could really like him.

Perhaps he felt the doubt instinctively. He seemed to hurry on as though he had not expected any answer.

'Like an egotistical beast I have told you all about myself, first, but I am dying to hear about you.'

'I am very well, thank you.'

'Yes. But you have had trouble. I can see it in your face —and, I hardly like to say it, but I can see it in your dress— your pretty black dress.'

'Yes. I am in mourning.'

'Some one you loved. I am so sorry.'

His dark sunburnt face was turned to her, darkly sympathetic; his low voice seemed to ring true with real regret.

'Tell me.'

Then Vivien told him: a very little, then a little more, then all about her grief for the poor old schoolmistress. It seemed incredible that she should thus open her heart to this strange and almost dreaded man; but the sudden ease that came with letting loose the pent-up words to intelligent and apparently sympathetic ears was so great that, once started, the word-fountain had to play itself out.

'Isn't, isn't it cruel that the b—b—best people should—?' and Vivien, sniffing as she walked by his side, was unable to complete poor Maitey's epitaph.

'My dear girl, it is what I always think. The cruelty of fate! That's what I always think of.' He went on in a low, sad voice: almost a whisper. 'I have known good women like your Mrs. Maitland. But, this is the sad truth. It is all so sad that it will not bear thinking about.'

Thus, in the sympathetic whisper, Mr. Claude Stanford summed up. Analysed, the sentiment was not deep or enlightening, but to Vivien it was inexpressibly soothing. They talked after this of quite indifferent matters—the collapse of the recent season, the Jubilee, the Indian visitors. Not till they reached Vivien's door did Mr. Stanford touch again on his favourite subject of friendship.

'We will be friends now, won't we? It seems to me that we are both rather down on our luck—both pretty lonely, eh?' He had taken her hand in his, but he did not to-day endeavour to retain it. 'Let us be *real* friends—if only for a little while.'

Then he suggested a startling plan that was, in his opinion, the natural accompaniment of friendly intercourse. To-morrow he would call for her quite early in the morning, and they would go and spend a long and happy day somewhere high up the river. They would stay away all the day, all the

evening—but of course they would fly back the moment that she was bored.

'Oh, I could not possibly do that,' said Vivien.

She had given a little gasp as the prospect opened out so unexpectedly. It was an entrancing vision, but it could be no more than a vision.

'But why not? Why not?' said Mr. Stanford. His voice had taken a harder tone: he pleaded for, almost demanded, an explanation as though it was clearly his right to have it. He seemed offended, wounded. 'What is it? Why won't you come? Are you afraid of me?'

'No,' said Vivien, meeting his dark eyes fearlessly. 'I am not afraid of you'; and almost immediately she accepted the invitation.

Why should she be afraid of him? Or of any man? The thought that he should go away harbouring any such foolish notion was horrible to her. She longed for the pleasant hours he offered, the new gay scene, the fresh sweet air; but what had made acceptance seem impossible was the good proud thought that one should not accept of benefits from people one does not really like. But, after all, to him what was it? Nothing. How small the cost of rail-fare, cab-fare, etc., must seem to one into whose scheme of life there could enter the vainglorious fancy of breaking the bank at Monte Carlo! Marian would have told her to go. In all the street, from the top of the ladder to its lowest rung, there was not a girl who would have refused a similar invitation.

She gave herself up without reasoned thought to the joys of this unexpected happy day that fate had thrown to her. It was all good, from the moment when the wheels of the hansom cab scrooped upon the kerb of the pavement and told her, waiting in the narrow hall, that the man had not forgotten, but was true to the appointment. It was good to bowl along in the cab instead of trudging in the baking glare; it was good to be going away by train, to be leaving the dusty labyrinth; and best of all to be talking again instead of thinking: to be forced in mere courtesy to one's host, to pull down the mind-curtains on all sad pictures and hang a white screen to catch the changing coloured views of life's new lantern-slides.

Paddington was extraordinarily exhilarating: a place of confused strife, a sort of tourist battleground in which all London seemed fighting in a sudden frenzied rush for escape. On every platform, mountains of tourist-luggage and a dense struggling throng; the booking-office like the foyer of a

crowded theatre; each train being treated as a fort to be taken by assault at all hazards. It filled her with excitement, and in the hurry and turmoil, she and the man became in a manner comrades—playmates for the day, laughing and exciting themselves with unfounded terror lest, after all, they should fail to get away.

The man was pleasant thus, losing his dark oppressiveness, really enjoying it all, or pretending to enjoy it, as much as she did. To meet her school-girl spirit half-way, he seemed to have abrogated his heavy knowledge of the world: the settled, emotionless, outward habit that comes from the long years spent in splendid slothful ease—or so it seemed to her. He made no fuss or worry; let her hold his coat while he scrambled for the tickets; consented to be driven hither and thither by perspiring officials; made but a feeble protest at the impossibility of travelling, after the lordly manner proper to his natural state, in a reserved compartment; and was still smiling without ill-humour as at last they found seats in the overflowing train for Taplow.

Here again, after the pleasant drive in a fly, the same phenomenon: all the world—a lesser but still struggling crowd—wildly striving to escape—this time from the dry land to the water. But the dark labyrinth was fading; London had been left behind: no more black coats. The flannel-clad men and the gaily dressed women made the landing-stages of the boat-letters, the street itself, and all the space by the river seem as though a vast garden-party was in progress. It was impossible to obtain a punt, and the impossibility appeared to annoy him rather unreasonably: because this delightful sculling-boat, as the proprietor pointed out, was just as nice, if not nicer.

'If I go on the water in the evening,' he told the man authoritatively, 'I must have a punt. Keep one for me.'

'I must go back by about six,' said Vivien. 'You won't forget that I must be back early?'

'You shall go back when you like,' he answered as he rolled up his shirt-sleeves, baring the brown arms covered with dark little hairs, and exposing a thin bangle about his left wrist. 'You shall go back now, if you are tired of me already,' and, with two or three strokes, he pulled the boat out into the gliding stream, and let it glide without assistance while he moved the stretcher and settled down to his work.

'That's right,' he said, smiling. 'Steer me exactly as you are doing.'—She had wished to steer and be of use, so he had given her the silken ropes.—'Don't look behind you, and pull the lines

very softly. That is the essence of good steering. Look about you of course as much as you like—and, if you want to do nearly half the work, sit exactly in the middle—yes, like that. Now you are really helping.'

He was at work now, rowing easily and smoothly—with great art, she considered—able to talk and laugh and discuss things while the boat softly, smoothly glided on through a strange sunlit fairyland.

It really was fairyland—or fairywater—to Vivien. A scene of trim and perhaps tame loveliness, but with a gaiety of movement, light, and colour that filled one with joy! Garden succeeding garden; lawns like green velvet laid out and stretched tight to the water; flowers as in splendid shops, bouquets of preposterous size in china vases; rose-covered trellis upon white walls; blinds and immense umbrellas of red and yellow that flared like fire; fleets of private boats bobbing sedately before private harbours; the Venice-like glory of these floating houses—the long line of house-boats moored to form a water-street luxurious as Mayfair; the town, the bridge, the wondrous mechanism of the lock; and then the broader stream, with the stately, noble woods lying on the hillside, sleeping in the August sun, bathing their gnarled and twisted feet in the sun-warmed foot-bath of the sliding stream! And the floating population, girls and boys—filling the air with youthful, innocent happiness so that girls' voices inquiring if the salt had been left out of the hamper made sweet bell-music, and laughing, growling men were as river-gods, sunburnt innocent gods laying down punt-pole or scull, and even growling here in bassoon-like melody.—O happy, stalwart idlers and innocent, work-free nymphs to whom toil is but an empty word and the weariness of the baked labyrinth a thing unknown! And all of it, every common detail and familiar aspect of the well-used scene hitherto unknown to, undreamed of, by Vivien.

'Oh,' in a sudden foolish gush of gratitude. 'You really are a lamb to have brought me!'

'Am I?' and he shows his white teeth beneath the dark moustache as he smiles his satisfaction, and his dark watchful eyes settle upon her face, with intent scrutiny for a moment or so while he stops rowing.

'We are friends now,' and he laughs. 'You and I are going to be real friends, aren't we?'

'You are awfully kind I am sure,' says Vivien turning and looking at the beechwoods.

Suddenly, in the gay sunlight, in the midst of her almost explosive delight, it has come back. Only for a moment, then

dissolved in the sunlight again—some streamer of that dark cloud of oppressiveness that is as the man's very atmosphere.

'That's all right,' and he laughs and begins to row again. 'Don't worry yourself about it. You and I are going to be very great friends. Kismet. I have spoken. It is our destiny. It is going to be.'

And now he laughs again with honest, hearty laughter, provoked by a surprising discovery that his companion makes—laughter in which, when she understands the explanation, she presently joins. Turning to look downstream, she has discovered that the rudder is not in the water, but safely bestowed inside the boat. She has been steering only in imagination. She had surprised herself by her rapid success in a difficult art—no complaints, everything working so smoothly; and, all the time, he had been playing this joke upon her as though she had been a child.

Nevertheless, she is not offended by his lack of confidence in her powers. Indeed she likes him the better for the little schoolboy joke. It does far more towards the nurture of that friendship of which he speaks than his frequent and specific demands for its avowal. In the long hours that follow, the cloud is not perceptible—blown away by their joint laughter. She will doubt no more. He shall be considered a friend.

Lunch at a riverside inn; the river again; afternoon tea at a riverside hotel or club—she did not make out which—the river again; and then it was time to tear oneself away from fairyland. He implored her to rescind her decision: to stay and dine in the hotel garden, to see the river by moonlight, see the boats gliding by with Chinese lanterns like floating meteors, to listen to the music—there would of a surety be music, a band at the club by the bridge perhaps, and music at night was so very charming. Then they would go rushing homeward in a nice uncrowded express through the cool night air. Already there were fewer craft afloat, but he pointed to the numbers that still lingered. Punts, canoes, skiffs, only a man and a girl in each, whispering, gliding by, beneath the lengthening shadows of the poplars at the point where she made him turn—dozens of such floating couples. *They* were not hurrying away; they were not so silly as to fly from the falling peace of the summer evening. There were no chaperons apparently. He conveyed this circumstance to her attention, without dwelling on it. It was the good law of the innocent stream—no chaperonage demanded by Thames etiquette at any hour of the day or night. It was not easy to be firm and tear oneself away.

'Think how rarely you can spare the time for this sort of thing.'—It was exactly what she was thinking.—'Then, how silly to cut it short! What on earth should you hurry back for —to read one of those good books all the evening, or play cribbage with Mrs. Kearsley?'

'I shan't do that, but I must get back . . . yes, I am tired. . . . No, not really. I have loved it, but please don't try to keep me. You would spoil it all for me, because I *must* go.'

He really was nice. She smiled her gratitude to him. It was so natural that he should wish to prolong his enjoyment of the river, and it was hateful to feel compelled to deprive him of his evening's pleasure. But he would not for a moment entertain her suggestion that she needed no escort, and that he should stay down here by himself. Really and truly he was nice: with the facility and good humour of a true friend.

He found an empty carriage in their train, but they were followed into it by two other people. These were an enormous Frenchman and his wife, upon whom Mr. Stanford shot a glance of enmity. They meant no harm, poor souls, but they were fat and grotesque; and the Frenchman mopped his forehead, and made a dreadful noise in his throat at brief intervals. Moreover, they were devoured with a gnawing excitement about *le château de la reine* which rendered them very restless. When Stanford whispered his disgust at the presence of these travelling companions, Vivien could but agree with the sentiment however inhospitable to strangers in the land.

At Slough Station he made her change their carriage, hurrying her along the train almost from guard's van to engine in search of a vacant compartment. But there seemed to be two people —a homeward-bound unchaperoned couple—in each compartment of the long train; and as the train was just beginning to move they scrambled into a compartment thus occupied.

'This is all right,' said Vivien gaily. 'We can go on talking now. It was impossible to do anything but think of the *château de la reine*, wasn't it?'

The man at the other end of the carriage was glaring at them balefully, but Mr. Stanford did not observe this. He was looking out of the window, pulling and biting his moustache as though mightily discontented, while Vivien prattled to him.

'Now,' said Mr. Stanford at Paddington. 'Do be sensible. I can't let you go home to those wretched lodgings dinnerless and alone. We'll dine quietly at the Savoy—in that balcony, so that you shall watch the river and the boats, after all, and have some music too, and *then* you shall go quietly home. There *can* be no harm in that.'

This time her powers of resistance failed and she consented to prolong the treat in the manner urged. She was safe back in London; all was as it should be; he had proved himself gentle and trustworthy: no lion, but entirely lamblike. There was harm in it of course. It was harmful to cause him to spend so much money. But that did not really matter. Was not his life one continuous spraying of gold in heedless, uncalculating profusion? And the doubt as to benefits received was gone. It is a base kind of pride that cannot accept the gifts of real friendship.

A silence fell upon him with his point gained, but his dark eyes glowed and the blood darkened his sunburnt face for a moment; and he looked at Vivien intently, but without seeming to hear what she was saying, as they drove westward in their hansom. He was preoccupied, brooding, and she glanced at him in vague wonder and ceased talking. He had something on his mind. What was it? Perhaps he had not really meant her to accept? It was only a polite pretence—all the pleading—and she had committed a solecism in consenting. She would not go. She must be quick to release him.

But even while she thought of it and was framing the words of her excuse, the explanation of his silence came. He had a letter to write—a short but important letter. He must go into his rooms in St. James's Street and dash off this letter. Two, three minutes, and then, with the task done, his mind would be free and unburdened for the evening. Would she pardon him for this slight delay? Yes. Then he gave the necessary direction to the driver and turned to her with a smile again.

The cab-horse was in truth fleet although Mr. Stanford, biting his moustache, complained with sudden irritation of its sloth. The empty town had a curious peaceful aspect in the soft duskiness of evening. It was past eight: the traffic of the theatre-goers had ceased; the pleasure-seekers had entered the few pleasure-haunts kept open for them in this no-man's season of the year; the shutters were up before most of the shops; and people were wandering from pavement to roadway, sauntering across the vacant thoroughfares with as little fear of being run over as though they had been in country fields or on the sands of the seashore. The clock at the dear old palace was faintly illumined, and the lamps were beginning to show brighter in the softly encroaching darkness, as they reached Mr. Stanford's dwelling at the bottom of the silent street.

'Be as long as you like,' said Vivien.

'Yes, but come in. You—you can't wait here. I'm on the

first floor,' and he pointed to windows above the shop-front with gay boxes of flowers beneath them.

'You—you must come in with me,' he said with a sudden stammer. 'You, you see,—if any one noticed you here—waiting outside my rooms—they might think it odd.'

It was nice of him to have thought of that. A kind and friendly thought. And at once she obeyed him, springing out on to the pavement, and standing beside him while he unlocked the door with a diminutive key in a dear little round brass lock —so different to poor Mrs. Kearsley's door-furniture.

The hall was very dark and he held her firmly by the arm, pushing, or guiding, her before him towards the stairs, playing host in a somewhat breathless and spasmodic manner as he hurried her onward.

'Now—here we are—now—at last—there,' and he pushed open the door on the dark landing.

She entered the room and walked towards the flower-filled windows, glancing round about her with inquisitive and almost reverential interest. Splendid, most splendid! Deep chairs and long sofas, pictures, engravings, and photographs of women —myriads of these in silver frames—flowers, china, luxury; a large table with carved legs that carried books, magazines, papers, and an immense lamp: a gigantic trophy of silver and cut glass, with a satin and be-ribboned shade; through double doors a glimpse of further luxury: silver-stoppered bottles, muslin hangings, the red satin coverlet of the throne-like bed. This was the swift impression of a moment; and then, turning, she met his dark eyes. The key grated in the lock. He was locking the door of the room. He was coming towards her— and in a moment his arms were about her, and she was fighting with him fiercely, wildly, as though for life, as though for more than life.

The horror of the thing seemed to stun and stupefy her, crushing and annihilating thought, leaving her power only for the unreasoning fight of an animal caught in a trap. His hot breath, his red face, the hoarse, stammering voice, his brutal dragging pressing hands drove her mad with sick loathing and panic-struck despair, while with head down she struggled.

'Don't,' he kept saying, 'don't be a fool.' She had found breath for a quickly stifled scream. 'No, I can't let you go— I can't.' His hand was upon her mouth. 'My darling girl— don't—don't be so silly.'

But suddenly she was free: had freed herself by desperate writhing or been loosed by him; and now, breathless both of

them, they were dodging each other, as though in some horrible deadly game, about the central table.

'You beast—you beast—you beast. Open the door, I tell you.'

He was about to clasp her again when she succeeded in her suddenly inspired endeavour—the whispering voice of panic fear, which alone guided her, had told her to do it and given her strength. Over went the big table with a noble crash; the great lamp sent its fountain of broken glass flying wide and low; and the books banged down with a glorious clatter that all the house might hear. Then, head down, guided by the voice, she had rushed into the inner room—escape must lie this way since the other door was barred—and was tearing with frenzied fingers at the brass bolt; and then, ere he could overtake her, she had gained the freedom of the landing. He was half-way down the stairs as she reached the hall door; he had nearly caught her before she had mastered the action of latch and handle and won the freedom of the open street.

'Drive on,' she gasped. 'Drive on, I tell you,' and at last the cabman obeyed and carried her away.

Mr. Stanford, standing on the pavement for a moment, with livid face and redly glaring eyes, looked after the departing cab; shrugged his shoulders; and returned to his splendid but disarranged rooms.

XVI

THUS another revelation had come to Vivien: the real Mr. Stanford had revealed himself. The darkly-smiling mask could never again deceive: the man was bestial and horrible, unthinkably false, unspeakably wicked—a ravening beast of prey.

Hers had been no foolish panic. But oh what a fool, what a miserable fool she had been not to fear him earlier! Lying awake all the night, she thought of it: in feverish pain, yet understanding him with extraordinary clearness, reading the hateful male mind, piercing the lowest depths of the nauseating male mystery.

For some inexplicable reason he had 'taken a fancy' to her, as Marian said; had given her those flowers, on an off-chance; had thought, if he had nothing to do some time or other, he might make her his. A poor shoppy—an easy victim.

She burned with indignation and was cold and sick with shame at the strong, clear thought. She had been shaken, had received as severe a shock to brain and nerves as though she had just escaped from a railway accident. She lay shivering even now many hours afterwards, but this was the goading thought that made the sleepless fever—the outrage and insult to herself.

This was what he had done—considered, and dealt with her as the humblest of shoppies, the lightest and commonest of the girls at the end of the street. Intolerable thought, dragging with it from the past all aiding and abetting thoughts or memories to make her suffer more! '*My* daughter, Vi.' Never forget that—the equal of the highest in the land. Always remember that—a Shelton.

With his idle wearisome hours, had come his careless enterprise. She was not even a hunted prey. He had paid her no single honour of the chase. Ah! what evil had she wrought, what pernicious curse had been laid upon her that a cruel fate should afflict her with so grievous a disgrace? She had thought herself strangely proud, fatuously haughty perhaps,—people had told her so; and yet this thing had happened. This man

had held her of so small account as to believe—the strong clear thought pursued its remorseless logic behind the throbbing temples and the burning eyes,—to think that he might win her to his will without an effort in the wooing: that she would be his submissive slave, meekly subservient to his vile desire in payment for a summer day's outing.

Surely no meanest of those tawdry, draggling girls but would have felt the shame of it—this basest insult that a woman can receive.

And as she lay thus through the slow night and the long daylight hours, she racked her mind, inventing scornful words—words that should stab and rankle, driving through even his callous, sin-toughened heart, to make him writhe in shame as she had writhed: words to be written, or spoken if by any misfortune she should ever be forced to give him words again.

Mrs. Kearsley had been dreadful last night, with curious sympathy and blundering aid.

'My goodness, whatever has happened to you, miss? *White!* Why—And lor' you're all of a tremble-like. Are you ill, miss?'

'Oh pay the cabman,' Vivien had gasped, hurrying through the narrow hall. 'Pay him for me, please.'

But the cabman had been extortionate, blustering and lying to Mrs. Kearsley about the immense drive from Paddington, the time he had been kept waiting in St. James's Street. Mrs. Kearsley came back twice for instructions: suggesting that a servant girl should go quietly to the adjacent police-station and summon the blue-coated judge to hear the case for and against, and decide upon it: driving Vivien frantic.

'Pay him, oh pay him anything and send him away.'

It was an infinitely small side of the disaster—but terrible enough in its way—this catastrophic loss of a quarter of a pound in the pinched season of her unprovided days.

'What is it?' asked Mrs. Kearsley, with inappeasable curiosity. 'Whatever is it, miss, that can have upset you like this?'

'A man,' said Vivien at last. 'A man who has been rude to me.'

'Oh dear,' said Mrs. Kearsley. 'A man! But not the cabman, miss? You don't mean him? You'd surely have let me fetch a policeman if it had been really him as upset you? What would be the use of having the station so handy as it is—if you didn't use it when you wanted it?'

Quite late in the morning a messenger—his private servant probably—brought her a letter.

She read it hurriedly, then tore it into shreds, with fingers that still trembled. It was a base, mean letter, and she wondered why, having nothing better to say for himself, he had been able to write at all. He ignored everything, reproached her for spoiling what was to have been a happy evening.

'It really was,' said Mr. Stanford, 'very cruel of you to leave me as you did.'

She flung the diminutive scraps of paper into her fireplace with contemptuous vigour. Not one word of apology or regret, not one hint of shame! Above all, no slightest, indirect allusion to the overturned table. His backward spring behind the fountain of glass, the composite crash, echoing through the house, alone stood out on the dark background of her thought as spots of comforting light.

As always, the day thoughts were better, sounder than the night thoughts. She could understand him now, she thought, more and more clearly. It was still most horrible to think of, but surprisingly simple by daylight. What she must do—beginning at once—was to forget that she had ever seen him or heard his name. Of course he, on his side, would never want to see her again, would never want to remind her of what had happened. It did not occur to her that his letter could be other than a last communication—the man's mean-spirited last words.

But all the dark springs that moved the man were not really plain to her—even by daylight.

He had called while she had been out in the afternoon.

'He *was* so sorry to miss you,' said Mrs. Kearsley, smiling and nodding her head. 'Oh he was regular put out, miss, with the disappointment.'

Vivien's pale cheeks flushed with indignation. She would never see this gentleman, she told the landlady, at any time, on any pretence—never!

'Oh, lor',' said Mrs. Kearsley. 'You do surprise me.' She appeared to be strangely crestfallen. 'He seemed such a grand gentleman! And him so set like on seeing you. Why I thought you 'd be blaming me perhaps for not keeping him.'

'Mrs. Kearsley. *This* was the man who insulted me. I must make you understand. He is *not* a grand gentleman—he is not a gentleman at all. If he comes here again, you must shut the door in his face. If he won't go, you must do what you said—send for the police.'

'Well I never!' said Mrs. Kearsley, and her face turned of a sudden red as she ran on in a curiously disconcerted, but very voluble manner. 'Well, who 'd have thought it? Him such a pleasant gentleman to speak to. God forgive me, I wouldn't

encourage him now—not for anything—after what you've said, miss.'

Vivien, still flashing indignation, was half-way upstairs when a most distressing idea assailed her, and she leaned over the balusters.

'Oh Mrs. Kearsley.' Her lips trembled and her voice came in a tragic whisper. 'Oh I do hope he didn't give you—you didn't take any money from him.'

But unhappily Mrs. Kearsley had done so.

'Oh, Mrs. Kearsley how *could* you? Oh how much?'

'A sovereign, miss—neither more nor less.'

Vivien could have sat down upon the dingy stairs and wept.

'How was I to know?' asked Mrs. Kearsley, red-faced, and herself upon the point of crying. 'After what you've said—what you've seemed to *mean*—I'd cut my hand off sooner. But at the time, miss, how was I to know? "I am giving you a lot of trouble," he says, lofty and smiling; "but I want you to deliver my message exact," then drops it into my hand when he goes, same as a man giving a penny to a child. How was I to know? I don't see as you should blame me. Of course I know a sovereign is less to one like him than ever a copper is to me.'

The poor wretch explained at great length. It had seemed a golden windfall, a good gift of providence.

'No, no, I understand. But Mrs. Kearsley will,—oh, I hardly like to ask. But don't, don't keep it. Will you send it back to him?'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Kearsley, 'I will and gladly. I hate the sight and feel of it now. It's *bad* money. I couldn't sleep now with it in the house.'

'It seems unkind to make you give it up.'

'I don't want it, miss. Why bless me,' and Mrs. Kearsley smiled rather sadly, 'how can I miss it? I shan't be no worse off than I was an hour ago.'

But of course the loss of this vagrant pound was a severe blow to her. Who could doubt it? Who could go up those narrow stairs, from floor to floor of grimy misery, and not understand Mrs. Kearsley's pain in the shattered dream of momentary affluence? Least of all Vivien.

There was a difficulty about sending back the money. Vivien could not on this occasion act as secretary, and Mrs. Kearsley was so poor a penwoman as to be scarcely equal to the briefest message of defiance or contempt. In the end, therefore, the assistance of the humble maid was obtained, and it was her red-knuckled hand that held the pen. 'Mrs.

Kearsley declines to accept the enclosed.' These were the words finally selected, and then the bad pound was despatched in a registered envelope.

But ere the matter was adjusted, Vivien had taken upon her shoulders this additional burden.

'See, Mrs. Kearsley. I cannot allow you to be disappointed. See. This is three shillings, and here is this pair of shoes and this scarf. If you sell them they will make up the pound.' Mrs. Kearsley protested. 'I want you to—you must really—to please me.'

Mrs. Kearsley protested again, but then accepted the goods in exchange for the cash—to please her lodger.

'How dare you call me Vivien?'

'Well, what shall I call you? I must call you something. I should like to call you my pretty bird. You are like a bird—so easily frightened. A word and away you fly.'

He had called in Marefield Street again. Mrs. Kearsley was out and the maid was helpless. He had entered the house, saying he would wait in the hall until Miss Shelton could come down and see him, and in sudden terror lest he should come upstairs, Vivien had descended, had come out of the house in order to get him out of it, and been forced to listen to his odious voice again. He had something to say. When he had said it, he promised to go away.

She would not look at him. With a stony face, with thoughts whirling in revolt, she walked by his side up and down the sordid street. But the policeman? No, that would be too degrading. She would not speak to him, and did not: except when stung to speech by what seemed a fresh insult. Low-voiced, but not unruffled, he tried to persuade her to 'be nice to him, to be friends.' He would not offend her again by too hasty proofs of his admiration. Let them just be friends for a little while. He would do anything in the world to retain—well, not to forfeit—her friendship.

'You mustn't pretend—you musn't really be so offended with me. You know how I admire you. You ought to forgive me—even if I let you see it too plainly. Ask other girls: ask that nice red-haired friend of yours. *She* wouldn't be so unkind.'

'Have you said what you wanted to say? Is that all?'

'No. I haven't begun. Vivien, do be sensible. Make it up. Come out to dinner with me to-night.'

'Mr. Stanford.' She faced him, near her door, with white intensity. 'You have made me hate you—every word you say makes me hate you more. Now, is that plain enough?'

'Hush, hush,' and he tried to take her hand. 'Don't say such dreadful things—such foolish things. You hardly know me yet. You'll like me—I promise you that you'll like me immensely, if you'll only give me a chance of knowing you better.'

Then, as she went up the steps:

'Stay. This is really what I wanted to say. I am not going to give you up. It's your own fault. You have made me fond of you, and I don't mean—'

She heard no more, but entered her feeble stronghold and banged the blistering door.

He was vulgar in thought, as well as base and cruel. Now that the mask had been lowered for ever, she thought she could see the vulgar narrow mind working in its narrow orbit; and the common work filled her with astonishment as well as with disgust. He had sent her a present: a jewelled bangle from a Bond Street shop—sent through the post without a word of explanation. This costly toy of wire-like gold and gaudy gems would be just the thing to sap the heart of a shoppy. More eloquent than words, the lavished gold would plead with her, win her thoughts to the noble donor: with glittering threads and flashing dirt would slowly chain the little soul of dirt. Incredibly vulgar and foolish!

She took the gift back to the Bond Street shop, and told the polite shopman that it had been sent to her in error.

'In error? One moment, miss. I think you will find that it is all in order.' And the shopman smiled discreetly as he turned the pages of a book. 'Please permit us to look up the entry—for our own satisfaction. Miss Shelton, Marefield Street. That was the direction. You are Miss Shelton? Will you not retain it, and communicate with the purchaser direct? Surely that would be more satisfactory?'

'I tell you it is a mistake,' said Vivien with her grandest manner. 'It is for you to remedy the mistake. Send it to the purchaser yourselves. The purchaser will no doubt explain it.'

She would not say 'he.' She would not betray any power to guess even the sex of the purchaser. But the discreet smiles widened behind her as she left the oppressive atmosphere of the rich bauble shop.

It was as the oppressive aura of the man himself, rolling about her its heavy folds, making her feel degradation and disgrace each time that a fold touched her. She breathed again in the hot street.

'Now don't walk so fast. It is really too warm to hurry. And I am a splendid walker. You won't get away from me.'

He had overtaken her as she approached the passage that leads into Hyde Park near the Barracks. Perhaps he had been lying in wait for her, perhaps he had been following her. She did not know; but he was here now—unavoidable. Again and again she had met him. He had been to Marefield Street twice; and Mrs. Kearsley, who had promised herself to give him a good piece of her mind, had seemed to lose all power, to turn craven in presence of the dark male force. He was filling his empty hours with a studied persecution. She could not go out to breathe the air without dread of meeting him. Once she had sprung into a cab and driven away from him—but that way ruin loomed.

'Where are we going this afternoon? Across to the gardens? Oh Vivien, don't let it be a silent walk to-day. It *is* so dull.'

She walked on in silence. Tramps were sleeping on the grass; children toddled, tottered, and then sprawled, while sitting nursemaids moved their perambulators with careless toes to silence baby while they gossiped of life and love; on all the seats a man and a woman; far and near the sauntering, whispering couples; and to all the outer world Vivien and her companion were a pair of promenading lovers also.

When she stopped, he stopped; when she moved on, he moved in step beside her. When she sat down on a seat—occupied by an elderly woman who was knitting thoughtfully as she watched the boats on the water—he sat down also, leaning his arm upon the seat-back, tilting his straw hat over his eyes, and talking in low, soothing tones. The old knitting lady, sure that they were lovers, out of sympathy and kindly feeling vacated the bench.

'You don't understand me a bit Vivien,—now don't stamp your foot. Why on earth mayn't I call you Vivien? I tell you to call me Claude. Well, do listen. I *did* try to forget all about you. But I couldn't. It was *you* I thought of all the time I was away. It is your fault—all yours. You should know your power—and of course you do. It is no good blaming me now—you should have been careful with me—never let me see you again.'

Then she walked on once more.

It was a horrible walk. As he talked, it seemed that he was

forcing her against her will to understand him better and better, as though he was lifting the last veil to show her all that she had not guessed of the gross male mystery.

All this was love as he understood it, and this sort of love had always governed his life. Many, many women had loved him—he told her this explicitly—and she remembered all those silver-framed photographs. He was a woman's man, not a man's man. He was one to whom women had been proverbially kind—this he conveyed to her without set terms—and when he loved, it was not hastily or lightly. He assured her that he was no common woman-hunter, drawing the world, setting the game on foot at the hazard of the day, and then hunting it down for the sport of the thing. But she, she had stirred his pulses from the first—everything about her, all of her from her proud little head to her dear little feet—'walking so unnecessarily fast!'—had pleased him. And the gaze of his dark eyes resting on her was like a lewd caress.

'I swear it is true. Your face haunted me all the time I was away.'

Surely, he hinted, it would be absurd, if—of all the faces that might have haunted him—her face was to torment him with impunity. He spoke smoothly and almost lightly—smiling now and then: affecting sometimes to treat the matter as an innocent little joke between them—as a man speaking on the most ordinary subject, in the most usual manner; but through the words and smile, he forced her to read and understand the ugly riddle, the obstinacy of the thwarted male, the coarse, unclean man-beast of strength and violence whose instincts are pricked and not stayed by the discovery that the prey turns from him in loathing.

It was a horrible walk in the airless August weather. On the dust-whitened grass some doomed sheep were being chivied by a vicious little dog, and she felt as powerless as the sheep to escape from her persecutor. The dog was not dangerous to them, but he was making the poor sheep miserable in one of the few hours left to them of life and sunshine. She did not fear him, but it seemed that the man was promising to render her life insupportable. She was not sheeplike. Ere the walk was over she planted those word-weapons: stabbing at him with every one of the horrible things she had forged in the silence of the night.

He was a coward. But the shaft turned like paper on his armour of proof.

'A coward? Oh no Vivien,' and he laughed. 'At least, only where you are concerned. I fear your anger.'

He laughed at all her artillery, and at last she said the horrid thing that she had made up her mind not to say.

He was to go back to his wicked cousin.

'But I don't want my wicked cousin, I want you.'

She recoiled in horror from his shamelessness. Not a word of defence, not a blow struck to ward off the reproach against the famous Mrs. Arncliffe: her good name sacrificed without thought or question; the gossip of the shop accepted as a well-known fact not worth discussing, and not now seasonable for discussion. He was a creature quite without sense of shame for himself or for others.

'Do you understand, I want you—*you*. No one else in all the world.'

He was like a personage in a vulgar play or a vulgar book. The thought came to her with a sort of bitter contemptuous mirth, as she stood for a moment looking through the trees towards the pretty, broken ground of Kensington Gardens. He was like the oppressive villain in a trumpery storyette in one of Clara's journals.

But this was disgraceful fact: no fiction.

He had seized her wrists, and was holding her by force here in the open path for all who cared to see.

'You and I are going to be friends. Now it is no use struggling. I am holding your hands as a lesson. You can't have everything your own way.'

An old gentleman looked round at the happy young people 'larking,' and smiled benignly as he sauntered away. Two nurse girls at a little distance watched with faintly envious interest. 'How that girl is carrying on with her swell to be sure!'

He held her by brutal, physical force: hurting her in his fierce grasp, seeming to take a joy in thus maltreating her in the eye of all the world, compelling her to his will for a few moments by the subjugation of his brute strength.

Then, stammering and laughing, he did at last show a flicker of shame. He was sorry that he had teased her. He was really ashamed of himself, as they walked rapidly away. Looking now with a sidelong glance at the dilated nostrils, the close-shut lips, and the fiery spot of colour that had come like a red stain upon the deadly white cheek, he was plainly ashamed of himself.

She was desperately tired that evening; her wrists were strained and swollen, with broken skin and a smarting pain as well as a dull ache; and she sat in her hot little room musing wretchedly upon her new trouble. How should she rid herself

from it? Suppose this man continued to molest her, what should she do? This was a man's task. And there was no man to help her. In all her little world of women no male to loose to fight and quell the male. Papa? No, that would be a cruel and heartless thing to do.

Rapid as the thought came the pitiful vision of her father set in motion: the tremulous wrath, the old man's voice shaken by avoidable passion, launched against insolent strength, effrontery in its prime, brute-pride to which not even white hairs might be sacred. Not to be thought of! Papa would answer the call—she was sure of that,—would demean himself as a true knight. But afterwards? The gloomy eyes lowering upon her. 'Has it come to this? *My* daughter: a shopgirl who involves herself in disreputable intrigue, and who fails in the open streets to make herself respected!' No, whatever happens, papa must not hear of our worries.

She has brought the trouble upon herself. She must fight for her own hand. Besides, it is a thing which she could not speak of to any one—except Marian. By Marian it would be understood. Marian in her vast wisdom might silently, unostentatiously help her: from the storehouse of her lore might at once bring forth the tablet that contained the exorcising charm. A word to speak—who knows?—and peace!

Feeling the bruised wrists, she longs for the return of Marian.

XVII

THE holidays were over: work and pay had begun again. Marian had returned and was sunburnt, dreamy, seeming to brood in a sort of ecstatic reverie upon recent delights: breezy Harwich, and the Bauermann-land to which she had penetrated in a wondrous over-sea excursion with these friends of hers. She was working very hard of an evening: bravely attacking after-hours' tasks in expiation of her brief respite.

Vivien had enjoyed another sort of respite in the cessation of Mr. Stanford's assiduous attention. He had been compelled to leave London, to go as a guest of a Colonel Cartwright to a house in the south of England. He gave her the address and urged her to write to him, and he promised most faithfully to return speedily and begin again. His absence made all the world bright, comparatively; rendered the shop a haven of rest in spite of the storm and stress of these autumn days, throughout which Mrs. Wardrop raged in a manner new and terrifying, crying to heaven to witness the disastrous state of trade and the incompetence of her assistants. But Marian must be told of the Stanford trouble, though it was not now pressing. On the first convenient opportunity dear Marian's wisdom-stream must be drunk of.

Now, on this dry and sparkling Saturday afternoon, the moment for confidences had arrived. The two girls had crossed the river, and were sitting on a bench in Battersea Park. Brown leaves from the planes crackled under foot as a troop of ragged children trailed across the grass; the dull whisper of bicycle-wheels came from the smooth gravel roads; there was a milky whiteness in the still warm air, and the sunlight seemed to spread and permeate with a colourless brightness in which all things—the motionless trees, the glassy river, the gaudy flower-beds full of the heavy-coated autumn flowers, the green-and-gold outlines of the distant bridge, and the mottled granite of the stone parapet close before them—showed with astonishing clearness and strength. The sense of distances seemed to be killed by the all-embracing light. If one stretched forth one's hand, it might touch the further shore or rest upon

the roofs of the red toy-like houses. It was a pausing, waiting, expectant day, of no season, full of a soft white splendour that belongs neither to summer nor to autumn; and Vivien seemed to feel the pause in the silent air, to be herself waiting, expecting: so that, as Marian began to talk to her, she had the sudden dream-feeling that all this had happened before, that she had thus listened, that she knew what was coming.

It was Marian who made the confidence.

She had been caressing Vivien's hand, looking at the water with a dreamy contentment in her blue eyes, and all at once, very shyly, she gave her a small photograph.

'Vi, the picture of my dear. . . . I always wanted to tell you, but I was afraid without his permission. He has told me he does not mind.'

Vivien stared at the coarse strong face with desperate intentness. What could she say? It was not by millions of degrees a face worthy of her Marian's love.

'Oh, Marian!' she whispered, staring at the broad, ill-modelled nose, the sausage of a moustache, the smugly self-conscious smile, the black tie with some monstrous pin in it, the rough double-breasted jacket, a yachting cap held in a clumsy fist, rock-work and pots of flowers—a common photograph of a common man.

'He's in the Royal Naval Reserve,' said Marian with gentle pride. 'But he is not in uniform there of course.'

'Did you meet him with your friends at Harwich?'

'Oh yes; he was down there. I went to be with him, dear. I have known him a long time. It began two years ago.'

'You dear old Marian. And have you really engaged yourself to him?'

Marian took back the treasured photograph; put it away in her pocket; and sat looking across the quiet river.

'Vi! It was difficult not to tell you—because I knew you would understand. You are so brave and strong, and when you talked—do you remember that night at Miss Brierley's?—of your own feeling: of the crown of a woman's life, and not counting the cost. . . . Well, that's what I've done. . . . We are not engaged. He isn't rich enough, poor dear. I know very well he would marry me to-morrow if he could.'

'Marian!'

Instinctively Vivien had drawn away to the farthest end of the bench almost, and now she buried her face in her hands, hiding the hot flood of vicarious shame.

'Marian, you don't mean what you say? It's not true?'

'Oh, Vi. How cruel, how cruel you are,' and Marian burst

into tears. 'You—you've said it again and again. And now because I tell you—you turn from me—as though you—you wouldn't touch me—as if I was not fit to—to—' And sobs choked her protest.

Vivien in a moment had slid back along the bench and was soothing, comforting.

'Marian—my darling Marian, don't, don't. You know how I love you. I didn't think that—I didn't—I didn't!'

But Marian would not be comforted. No pattings on shoulder or pullings at her twisting fingers, would make her lift her head. She sobbed most bitterly.

'Marian. Forgive me. It was only surprise—I thought, I thought if only he was worthy of you. That was all I thought. Whatever you do is right. You are the best, best girl in all the world.'

'You don't think that,' sobbed Marian. 'You used to. You don't now. But you made me believe you would.'

'I do always—always.'

The thought that she had inflicted pain upon her Marian was intolerable.

For the first time in all these years their relative positions seemed to have been reversed. For a moment the wise protecting elder had leant upon the younger for the support of kind words, had craved the balm of swift sympathy, and Vivien had failed her. The slowly mounting debt of gratitude had been basely dishonoured. But more intolerable than this remorse was the thought of the horrible thing itself. It tore at her entrails. A hot suffocating sensation of despair stifled the kindly soothing words as she dragged them out. Marian, the willing slave of this unknown master! A month ago she could have supported the shock of the revelation; would not have felt, as she felt now, this crushing weight of irreparable loss—the sorrowing regret for the Marian of her thought-building, the Marian who had now gone from her for ever. A month ago she might scarcely have realised all that was implied in Marian's confession. Now she understood, with a hideous completeness, a torturing strength of guided imagination—thanks to Mr. Stanford.

'Tell me dear—tell me everything.'

The words sounded toneless and unnatural—a strained and foolish voice that chattered while she thought.

The light had lost its dry, clear sharpness; the toy houses had receded to an immense distance; the river was miles away; Marian herself, this other unknown Marian, with wet blue eyes looking their reproach from red rims, was far off, indistinct, unreal.

'Oh Vi, in all the time I've longed to tell you, I never thought you'd blame me. *You!*'

And then, drying her eyes, she poured out her defence as though striving to soften the heart of a harsh unreasoning judge, who had denied his own oft-quoted law.

Life without love was insupportable. In all their lives—the dull hard lives of all these toiling girls—some love lay hidden. The shadow of the unseen man walked with them, seen by no other eyes than theirs, but surely present, consoling on the lonely path, telling them that in truth they were not quite alone.

In all their lives? Ah yes. Miss Brierley's, Miss Monroe's. Miss Inman's? *Many* shadows. Even Miss Crofts'? Oh yes. Clara's? Not yet, but soon no doubt to come—as it had come to nearly all the girls they knew.

And how should one question, strike bargains with one's love, when the love came?

'Oh Vi, it cheered me so to hear you talk—and all your words were meaningless.'

Holding her hand with passionate tenderness, looking at the blue eyes with an unutterable pity, Vivien listened, and tried to soothe.

To happier girls—rich, home-walled girls—the love came proudly knocking. Love riding in his car-triumphal, trumpeting his suit, came as a thing long-heralded—a thing to wait for from the hand of fate in peaceful expectation. But not to such as they. Sometimes, of course, the glorious chance came to one of these. A girl whose life shaped like a dream, to whom love declared itself as that sweet life-long bond called marriage! A lucky number in life's lottery, a thousandth chance—no girl of their degree could dare to wait for it. 'You know what Clara's always saying. Too many of us.' So fatally too many.

'Tell me, dear—tell me. Yourself. Don't mind the others.'

He was dear and brave and good. An officer in the merchant service—passenger line—only third officer as yet: but certain to get on—a true sailor—in the Royal Naval Reserve—who would be in the Royal Navy itself, should war break out, which God forbid.

But he was poor. The pay was wickedly low, the expenses of his position were grievously heavy—appearances to keep up, the hard necessity of proving that he was a man who, with promotion, would do credit to his company. When, after a trip, he flew to the secret solace of his storm-tossed life, it was as much as he could do to purchase the return ticket from Harwich—nothing, absolutely nothing left to gladden his

darling with treats and presents and costly pleasures. This afflicted him sorely, but Marian did not mind. She gloried in making him happy, in taking from him nothing but the treasure of his love.

Vivien, squeezing her friend's hand, understood it all with almost unbearable completeness. It tore at her entrails, turning her sick with the pity of it. The kindly veil lifted: the cruel mystery laid bare: her Marian working by night, always in want of money in spite of so much industry and the allowance from home, the humble subservient slave of the unseen bestial tyrant. The high rent paid for the devourer's entertainment: food, drink, and lodgings provided by the hard-worked drudge—oh horrible, most horrible!

'You know that was why I left Mrs. Kearsley's, Vi. My dear used to come to me there, but she made a fuss—said I must go in the end. But she never told you. That was decent of her. She is a good sort, Mrs. Kearsley. But I am happier where I am—much happier. They make no troubles there.'

'Marian. Tell me. Where did you first meet him?'

Marian looked across the river with a wistful reflective pathos in her blue eyes. She was composed again now, speaking calmly and contentedly in a sort of introspective whisper:

'One night at the Exhibition. Two years and three months ago. A lovely July night. The people I was with went early, and left me to go back by the District; and he spoke to me. I was getting my ticket at that office in the gardens—West Kensington. I wouldn't answer him—at first. But he followed me down to the platform and sat down on the same seat, and just went on talking. I wouldn't really talk—only saying yes and no; but, Vi, I think I knew even then—I think I knew in some mysterious way at the first sound of his voice by the booking-office—what he was going to be to me.'

Their mutual relations were reversed. Never again could she lean on Marian. She thought now of Marian with a yearning tenderness: longing for the power to shield her ancient guardian. She was fonder of her now than ever; but the sense of loss remained, tingeing all her thoughts with sadness. Something that our little world had held of quiet strength and patient steadfastness had crumbled into dust and left one shaken by the sudden fall. What next that we have deemed secure may tumble into ruin?

The sadness of the autumn days seemed to have new meanings, the fading year to symbolise one's fading hopes. Life was ugly, obscurely vile, and almost insupportable. A passage, for

most of us, through a gloomy cavern lit for a moment by the dream-flickerings of our childish fancies, then one by one such glow-worm hopes extinguished, and we are left to grope in darkness.

Alone in her mean little room, during the long evenings after the dull day's work, she was oppressed with an invincible lassitude, a weariness of spirit that was like physical pain, and as she sat morbidly brooding, Marian's confession haunted her. The horror of it lay in the man. She had built up her own love-creed from dream-materials, and had spoken of it with childishly strong conviction; but the surrender in her simple creed was truly a dream-surrender to a dream-love. The brutal fact—Marian's life in those coarse hands—appalled her. Not of this had she dreamed and babbled.

Morbidly brooding, her thoughts seemed to crystallise into horror of the male. 'Men can be very cruel to us women, Vi.' That was the cry of poor Mrs. Maitland thinking of the martyrdom of her sex. And did not all her own experience confirm the truth of the martyrdom? Aunt Burnett, Mrs. Page, Mrs. Kearsley—all had suffered from abominable men. Of all the married women she had known, Mrs Wardrop alone seemed to have escaped, to have somehow emancipated herself and won a valiant fearless independence. But worse, far worse, was the thraldom of all these girls as she saw it now by the light of Marian's revelation. Morbidly brooding, she thought of them as flowers, asking but of fate a little sunshine and warmth, and as they turn to the sun, a hog sniffing at them, then trampling them down. And the horror of the abominable men appalled her, absorbed her tired brain and held her thought prisoner. Demons, ogres, fiends with hearts in their breasts that were made of stone which if it ever softened changed to molten fiery lava: cold, cruel satyrs—with never a frisk in the sunlight—horrible, night-preying, nymph-befouling satyrs.

Mr. Stanford would like to be in her life what the sailor was in Marian's; but, unlike the sailor, he of course would pay his way.

He had told her this now very plainly. He had come back from the house called Hacketts, and was quietly, methodically tormenting her. His manner had changed: he was nearly always smooth of tongue and gentle of voice, but persistent enough to drive one mad, as though trying to wear one out with his smooth stream of words, to prove by his smiling presence that he for his part would never know weariness, that he was as untiring and as unavoidable as destiny.

'Vivien, think what I could do for you if only you'd make up that obstinate mind of yours to let us be friends. It tortures me to think of the wretched life you lead—the hardships that Vivien suffers.'

'You are not making my life easier for me.'

'No, but I would—I would make it a bed of roses for you, compared with this, if you would only let me. Why won't you let us be friends? What is it you are afraid of? No one in the wide world would know—or care. No one on earth need guess. Vivien, you must know you could trust me. We would make each other happy—a secret happiness which no one could understand.'

Thus the hateful stream flowed on.

'What do you think is going to happen to you? Where do you think you are drifting? You can't mean to waste all your youth, to let the golden years slip by, one after another, in this wretched existence. Vivien, I shall make you angry but I must say it—If it's not I, it will be somebody else. Then why not let it be me?'

And he would tell her of his love—of what he called love.

'Do you understand what you have done to me—made me your abject slave? I swear it is true. You have made me unfit for life—if you are not going to be kind to me. I think of you, waking and sleeping. Well then, you can do what you like with me. Trust me and be kind.'

Then he argued in a matter-of-fact way, as though assuming the character of some wise old friend, dispassionately discussing the line of conduct that would lead to the most advantageous results, disinterestedly desiring what was best for her, leaving himself for the moment outside their consideration.

'Honestly I don't believe you know your own power, Vivien. You are different from other girls. There is something about you that draws men on to their destruction, to make them your slaves whether they wish it or no. But before this happens they must see you, of course. Vivien you ought to marry well. You ought to make a great match, but you won't find a husband in Mrs. Wardrop's shop. Don't think that I would selfishly spoil all your glorious chances. I can't ask you to marry me, but I don't want to prevent you marrying some one else when he comes along. I want you to snatch a little happiness at once—as all the wise girls do. You would be free as ever, free as half the girls in London are: but not stupidly wasting all their best years in solitary waiting. Do you understand? We would be friends, a year, two years—and then if you were tired of your

faithful, discreet old Claude you could dismiss him with a word. Oh, Vivien, do be wise and believe I am giving you good advice. Then why mayn't we be friends?'

'Am I to tell you once more? Very well. This is the real reason. Because I hate you.'

'Don't say that again Vivien,' and the dark face had an ugly scowl upon it. 'I am not going to give you up. Don't tell me you hate me again.'

And, vaguely, he began to threaten her. When girls said that sort of foolishly rude thing to men who loved them, they were playing with fire, with silly words were inviting unkind acts. Men stung by cruel words were sometimes driven to what girls call cruelty—losing control of themselves, forgetting all but their resolute aim: the attainment of their heart's desire—by fair means or by foul.

'I am not in the least afraid of you.'

'Afraid! Heaven forbid. But you'll not be silly, Vivien. You'll think over all I say—and you'll be wise: before very long you'll be wise.'

She was not afraid of him. Yet fear now and then seemed to follow in his footsteps—a shapeless and morbid terror that came when the man was gone. A sudden cold whisper of panic would make itself heard as an echo of his voice hours after the voice had ceased.

One Sunday he was with her in the Brompton Road, and to escape she had entered the Oratory. Here, within sound of the omnibuses and the cabs, in the splendid, dimly-lit church, among the faithful praying to the unseen powers, she dropt on her knees and tried also to pray. She would pray for deliverance from her tormentor, crave this little boon of high heaven: freedom and peace from a well-nigh unbearable annoyance. But she could not pray. He had followed her into the sanctuary and was walking to and fro beyond the rows of chairs, pausing now and then to watch her on her knees—when she looked up his eyes met hers. He had a smile on his lips—a wicked, irreligious, admiring and amused smile. She could not pray with the man watching her. But, while still on her knees, something was vouchsafed to her—a calming wave of reasoned thought. This is no matter for God's interposition. It is simply nothing at all—a fool of a girl and a beast of a man: two ants at war on the ant-heap, not a disturbance which must be brought to the notice of the Maker of ants and ant-heaps, but as a last resort to some one quite other. She came out of the church feeling strong with sudden resolve.

'Mr. Stanford, do you see that policeman? Unless you have

left me before I get as far, I shall tell him—and—and give you in charge.'

'Oh Vivien. What a cruel girl!' and Mr. Stanford walked on with her towards the officer of the law. 'And what will you charge me with—pocket-picking, arson, murder? What an unscrupulous girl to get rid of people like that. You ought to have lived in the Middle Ages,' and Mr. Stanford laughed. 'They won't lock me up for being in love with you, you know. That's not a crime: it's a misfortune.'

Vivien stopped. Half the distance had been traversed. Another fifty yards would bring them to the policeman.

'I mean what I say,' she said resolutely. 'If you don't go now, this minute, I shall tell him.'

'Tell him what? Discuss our love-affairs with Constable X24? Vivien do you think we ought to? Won't he think it rather odd? But never mind. Come on.'

Vivien took a few paces; then her feet faltered; and she paused irresolute. Suddenly a sense of helplessness overcame her. She did not doubt that the arm of the law would be strong enough to succour her and punish him. But in her complete ignorance she could not guess how. The policeman, perhaps, would take them before a magistrate, and the magistrate would hear her complaint and mete out justice; fine the man or bring an injunction against him; and there would be a report of the whole proceedings in the newspapers! She could not tell the policeman. The threat had failed. This man's wickedness was such that he feared neither God nor the Police.

'Come along Vivien.' He had been reading the cloud of doubt on her face: had been reading every thought, it seemed. 'We'll have it all out with Policeman X. This is a new experience. I have never been given in charge before'; and he slid his arm in hers, and drew her a little way further towards the man in blue. 'Don't try to get out of it. If you struggle I shall call for him.'

It was ludicrously humiliating, tragically absurd, but he teased her and tormented her now as a nursemaid teases a child. The policeman filled her with dread; she could not face the ordeal of police assistance; and he was cruelly dragging her to the encounter. But he released her when she struggled, and, laughing, crossed the road with her behind the policeman's broad back.

'What a child you are,' he said abruptly when they were close to Marefield Street. 'What a child you are, Vivien'; and in his voice there was a tenderness that she had not heard before. 'And what a brute I am to you—am not I a brute to plague you?'

It seemed that for the time at least a genuine feeling of remorse had seized him. The sudden change in his tone, the intuitive conviction that for the moment he spoke with quite sincere regret moved her curiously with self-pity—the overpowering self-pity that fills the heart of a child when a hard grown-up unexpectedly begins to console it in its trouble.

'I think you are horribly unkind to me,' said Vivien, and the tears came to her eyes.

'Listen. I promise. I'll not be unkind to you any more, I'll leave you alone—I'll *try* to leave you alone. But if I promise that, you must promise me something.'

'What is it?'

'I think I can afford to wait—if you promise. My poor child you don't know life—I do.' He spoke now with intentness, but not unkindly. 'My poor, proud Vivien, have you ever thought what may happen to you any day—some bad stroke of luck—some unexpected upset of all your scheme of life—that would put you at the mercy of the world—helplessly in the power of anybody who wanted you in his power?'

'I don't know what you mean. Nothing is going to happen to me.'

'No—I don't say it will. But if it should happen. Promise me this. Promise me that if the trouble ever happens, you will come straight to me and let me help you *then*.'

'No. I won't promise.'

'You'd better promise. Vivien I *want* to be kind to you. Promise me.'

'No.'

'Then take care that I don't make the trouble come.'

His voice had changed. He was fierce and cruel again, biting his moustache in anger; and then the voice resumed its smooth soft tone again.

'I didn't mean that. You foolish, foolish girl, good-night.'

It was in the evening after this menace, that fear came like an echo of the words.

What had he meant? Had he intended to lift still another veil, to show some further monstrous wickedness at which she had never guessed? Was he hinting at some dark infamy of the infamous labyrinth amidst which girls walked unconsciously, as travellers walking in a forest where assassins lie in wait, until the hidden peril takes them and in a hideous flash of despairing thought they understand their doom? Hastily she lit another end of candle and set it on the mantelpiece: a beacon to help her fight the shadows with its feeble gleam. Like shadows filling the little room, like choking folds of an oppressive gauze veil,

the morbid fancies came thronging and pressing, wrapping her round in fear. What had he meant? What could befall her even if she were quite friendless and alone? And forgotten things, things that she did not know she had ever heard, came vaguely in memory's hurried whisper. Could it be true that girls were lured and caught in the labyrinth: hunted and trapped and swept from the lighted streets to be seen no more? And imagination, pushing memory aside, came hurrying with the morbid brain-pictures. See. A room with darkened glass, and bars before the windows, and a white girl-prisoner. They have kept her here days and nights. She has ceased to hope. Can you see her face? Look. Yourself, Vivien. Listen. Footsteps on the stairs. Nearer, nearer, as she writhes on the bed in an agony of horror. He for whom she has been trapt is coming to her now.

'Lor' bless us,' said Mrs. Kearsley. 'What's the matter, miss?'

'You—you startled me.'

Mrs. Kearsley, laboriously plodding up the steep staircase, carrying a tray and a dish, has found her young lodger white-faced and violently shivering, glaring at her with terror-stricken eyes as she stands breathless in the doorway.

'Why, your teeth are fairly chattering,' says Mrs. Kearsley, looking about her with inquisitive eyes, scrutinising the debris of her lodger's evening meal that still cumbers the table, and rapidly taking in certain evidence for which she is not unprepared.

'Of course it's too early to talk of fires,' says Mrs. Kearsley, 'but the nights draw in cold. You should wrap yourself up warm in a coat or shawl. We don't want to have you ill,' and the prying eyes ascertain that there are in truth no crumbs upon the table, and then probe the half-open sardine tin. 'Oh, miss—how you do hoard your sardines! There was four yesterday and there's three to-day. I tell you it ain't safe to keep them like you do.—You 'll do yourself a mischief with them some day.'

Vivien scarcely listens. She ceases to shiver, and smiles upon her landlady, whose company is to-night most welcome.

In truth, the reason why she hoards her sardines, fails often to provide herself with a loaf, is of the simplest. It is impossible to live in comfort on a pound a week, even if one had not to pull one's affairs straight after the financial stress of the holidays. More and more is she forced to rely upon Mrs. Barrett's shop fare and less and less can she provide for herself.

'The cause why I come disturbing you miss,' says Mrs.

Kearsley, depositing her tray and speaking with an embarrassment that she attempts to carry off by a sprightly manner, 'is simply I want you to help me out with my supper to-night. The girl has played me the trick of getting a double supply—only cold 'am and beef, and some beetroot—thinking—as I did say in the morning—that Mrs. Skinner was going to join me. But Mrs. Skinner has gone to friends, so do, miss, help me out—as a favour to me—and pardoning me the liberty—do miss help me out by snapping up this. As I say of your sardines: it is not safe to hoard a lot of food which only goes bad before ever it is eaten.'

While she speaks, she relays the board and brings a chair up to the table.

'You are very kind, Mrs. Kearsley, but I don't think I am hungry. I really don't think I can eat anything—more. Unless—unless you will stay with me and talk to me while I eat it.'

'Why of course I will, miss.'

By such subterfuge and devious art does Mrs. Kearsley escape the burden of a thought that has been weighing upon her downstairs in her dismal basement—the nasty, uncomfortable thought that, on this depressing Sunday evening, her lodger will go supperless to bed. Really not a bad sort—Mrs. Kearsley.

XVIII

'SINCE that damned Jubilee,' cried Mrs. Wardrop, banging the table, 'every mortal thing seems to have gone to the devil.'

All the shop trembled: each assistant effaced herself as best she might—slinking behind one of the press doors, stooping over an open drawer, or hiding a scared face in the lift and pretending to send down goods to Miss Crofts. It was impossible not to tremble, for the wrath of Mrs. Wardrop in these dark days, when the electric light burned from morning to night, was very terrible. Business had certainly recovered; there was work in plenty; the blouse-hunters were returning to the hunt; but no signs of prosperity appeased the fury of Mrs. Wardrop. She came to the day's work with a brooding aspect, and at the slightest misadventure—a blouse sent back by a troublesome customer, a country parcel delayed by the post office or railway company, a letter that contained a small cheque on account in lieu of a big cheque in settlement—bang came the heavy hand, making one almost jump out of one's skin, and the tornado of vulgar rage swept the shop from glass window to trying-room.

To Vivien, looking back to the happy summer, it seemed that Mrs. Wardrop had correctly fixed the date of the beginning of her own disasters. Her sun had shone for the last time on that auspicious day. Since then all her little world had been slowly falling into chaos and darkness. As this second winter crept onward, her difficulties became more and more crushing. Instead of a going concern established on a sound basis, her life was a postponement of utter failure: a miserable struggle with inexorable truth.

A suspicion of ill-health or of shabbiness in garb would ruin one with the remorseless employer. She would have no shabby starvelings, and more than once she had threatened Miss Carey for neglecting to fill herself out and put a little colour in her pallid cheeks. Thus one walked in constant dread as well as in occasional hunger. Just such a little outside help as one was forced most fatally to obtain for oneself would have saved one

Half a pound now and then would have warded off these visits midway down her social ladder to the second-hand clothes shop, in the dirty little parlour of which Mr. Crump the proprietor had driven cruelly hard bargains over the sale of trimmed petticoats and silk stockings, that she had been forced secretly to carry to him. Papa's allowance had absolutely ceased with that payment in May. Papa's kind intentions had obviously been too wide in scope, for now it was evident that he could not assist her to the smallest extent. He conveyed the sad fact in his well-established way—by silence. For a long time she hoped—all through the tourist season, when the well-to-do world is wandering far away—that his absence from London, from England, was the cause of the silence. He would come back, find her two or three timid reminders waiting for him, and write to relieve her necessities with tardy but glorious completeness. She hoped this—in spite of the past, in spite of reasoned thought. But quite at the end of September a chance meeting with papa made the matter painfully clear.

It was one afternoon in St. James's Park—a Saturday afternoon of course. She was alone, and he came towards her very slowly along one of the paths by the water's edge. By a strange coincidence he was walking with that very old fellow of the big beard, known to her so well by sight. Among the lounging riff-raff, the shabby girls and abject lads, these two old men looked most noble and impressive—creatures of a higher, ruling race. Her father was wearing a black, close-fitting coat, and in it he looked extraordinarily thin and fragile: with a white-haired dignity, a sort of shaky, old man's splendour that made her heart stop beating and then begin to race.

She had recognised him at a great distance, and, as he slowly approached, she suffered a subtly mingled emotion—pride in him, fear of him, and for a moment an insane tenderness: a yearning to believe him all that he was not. But, above all, the wonder of it made her heart beat faster and faster. Almost a stranger, seen thus by chance, and yet her father!

He knew her again, baring his white head with a stately courtesy, instantly repeated by the old fellow with the beard.

'Vi! My dear Vi, how are you?'

He dismissed his companion: left him to continue his unceasing promenade about the London streets, and stopped to talk to his daughter. Presently he strolled on with her, and, looking at his watch, made an astounding proposal. They would go to a little shop that he knew of in the Buckingham Palace Road and have tea together.

'It is very good of you,' said Vi, seated with him at the marble

table in the tea-shop. 'But, at this time of the day, ought you not to be at your club?'

'I ought, my child. But we are closed for repairs—quartered on our junior friends across the way. It is not the same thing. I am getting old, Vi—I do not feel really at home there. I have enjoyed my tea with you, dear.'

'Papa! Who was your friend?'

'The man I was walking with? That, my dear, was Lord Weardale.'

Then Clara was right. That surprising instinct of hers had not been at fault.

He was very kind to her this afternoon, sitting at the little table for a long time, seeming in no hurry to be rid of her. He had, it appeared, been in London all through the tourist season, involved in worrying business, bothered by a series of annoyances. He asked no questions. He said nothing about the unanswered letters. Vivien, listening, did not speak of the letters either. She gulped once as she drank her tea, and one piece of her bun was somewhat difficult to swallow; but she understood.

He did not at parting suggest that they might before long meet again.

'Good-bye Vi—Don't come any farther.'

She had walked with him past the Chelsea Hospital and nearly to the embankment.

'God bless you my dear.'

She turned, and watched him from the corner of the side street, as he walked away down towards the river: a fragile black figure, stooping now, it seemed, and leaning on the stick that he used to swing. She had her handkerchief ready to wave to him if he happened to look round. But he did not: so she used the handkerchief for another purpose.

Clara refused to evince pleasure when told of the confirmation of her surmise about the man with the beard. 'Oh really?' said Clara very coldly. Clara was always cold now.

'No I don't understand you Vivien,' she said once. 'You are too deep for me. If I like people I *must* confide in them—and you are just the reverse. No, I could not talk to you in the old way.'

The loss of the prattle of this frivolous but kind-hearted little friend added to the depression of spirits when the lighted shop lay day after day like a ship lost in the rolling sea of the December fogs. But what was the basis of Clara's suspicion? Vivien would not ask: with wounded pride she went about her

work in silence, but she understood something of Clara's thought after a visit from Mrs. Arncliffe.

'Oh by the way, Miss Shelton,' said Mrs. Arncliffe. 'I wish you would tell Claude I want to see him,' and then she laughed and turned away. 'Oh never mind.'

Mrs. Wardrop, Clara, and Miss Inman were all listening as they stood about the customer. Vivien, serving another customer, had passed the little group. She could not answer: Mrs. Wardrop's inquiring eye was on her; the enemy had delivered the blow knowing that it was not in her power to defend herself.

'You *are* deep,' said Clara almost scornfully. 'Of course I know he sees you home. I passed you one night—close to you—and you never saw me. I have known about it for ever so long—but I think you might have told me. *I* should have told *you* a thing like that.'

Clara had not forgotten her artless confession that she feared Mr. Stanford had fallen a victim to her own charms; and she found something unpalatable in the discovery that he had come back to the shop to 'follow up' somebody else with great determination. She would not have minded had the fact been broken to her in a friendly and considerate manner. There was no envy in her simple nature, but no one likes to make a fool of oneself by anticipating a danger which is not about to befall.

He had been away for months, but on his return he had troubled Vivien again: not persistently as in the summer, but at intervals. She had found him waiting for her in the lamp-lit street outside the shop, once or twice, and, as Clara said, he had walked with her to her door. And he had talked of her to his wicked cousin: in the shameless intimacy that existed between these two shameless people, had perhaps discussed his fantastic love for the shop-girl. It was horrible to think of. Plainly the woman had desired to insult her before all the shop: to injure her by showing that she was aware of the man's pursuit.

At closing time, a few nights after Mrs. Arncliffe's visit, when Vivien came upstairs, he was waiting for her in the shop itself. Hat in hand, he was leaning an elbow on the mantelpiece, and Mrs. Wardrop was chatting with him in a very gracious and affable manner: giving her opinion on a new piece at one of the theatres.

'It is a performance, believe me Mr. Stanford, of a most vulgar description. I looked round at other ladies in the stalls and saw they felt the same as I did. Really we ought all to have walked out of the theatre—as a formal protest.'

He told Vivien that it was raining slightly, and asked her to

let him get a cab. He spoke as though his presence had been expected, indeed, conveyed the impression that he was there by prearrangement.

'Good-night,' said Mrs. Wardrop in a most gracious, drawling voice. 'Good-night, Mr. Stanford,' as he held the door for Vivien to pass out.

'I believe,' she said, hurrying homeward through the rain, 'that you—you are the meanest and most contemptible man that ever lived.'

'Vivien!'

'You do this—to—to disgrace me—to make them think—'

'I do it because I can't keep away from you. What does it matter what they think?'

'You know how it matters to *me*—and that's why you came there. You are purposely bringing disgrace upon me—in every way you can think of.'

Mr. Stanford laughed and apologised. He would be more circumspect in future. It was absurd to accuse him of villainous machinations when love supplied the simple clue to all his actions. But he would not come into the shop if that was against shop-law: he would wait for her outside, even if it poured cats and dogs.

Certainly, if of settled plan Mr. Stanford was now trying to link her name with his in the minds of all who knew her, he was accomplishing his design very effectually.

Next morning Mrs. Wardrop had ceased to drawl, and her manner was bereft of all grace. She read her letters, and ere she had opened them all she had twice banged the table. Then, tossing them over to Miss Inman, she walked about her shop—like a martinet skipper having a sharp word ready for each of the crew.

'Miss Shelton. I didn't care about what happened last night. You can't receive visitors here you know. I don't want any rigmarole in explanation,' and she raised her big hand, imposing silence. 'That's all—a nod's as good as a wink. You understand. I can't have it.'

Vivien with a struggle remained silent.

'Miss Carey. I can't have your mother sniffing in and out here like she does. If she has anything to say to you she must wait till after hours. It's not her fault that she can't dress herself like the lady I well know she is by birth, but she's not an ornament.'

Miss Carey withdrew into the trying-room and wept. It was dreadful to the others to have to stand by and hear such cruel words. But everybody's turn came in time.

'Clara, all what I've said applies to you. Good God, people seem to think the shop's run for their amusement. I won't have that Mrs. Goff here.'

But Clara protested that there was no likelihood of this lady appearing again. Of late, at the mention of Mrs. Goff's name, Clara had hung her head and confessed with hot cheeks that she had been mistaken about her friend and patron. She never wished to see her again. She felt so strongly on the subject that she had written to tell her so.

'Glad to hear it. I won't have her. If she shows her ugly face in here I'll serve her as I done that woman from Putney.'

This customer—whose custom was indeed not of a princely extent—Mrs. Wardrop had fallen upon in wrath and then dismissed with loud contumely.

Trade was now good; the blouses were flowing out in a full stream; but Mrs. Wardrop was insatiable. It seemed that a demon of greed possessed her: in her insensate haste to grow rich, no mounting piles of pounds could calm her. Every day some hateful scene occurred. Mr. Pritchard, the travellers from the Nottingham house, the man who came to mend the clock, the man who came to sweep out on Saturdays—all tasted of her fury. Vivien and Marian, whispering together, agreed that Mrs. Wardrop had become a different person. Her temper had ever been fiery, but in the past she had shown a joviality and noisy good nature—especially when its exhibition did not run into money. Now, she was a woman driven by furies. Vivien, when whispering her horror, never thought of her sudden glimpse of that other Mrs. Wardrop in tears at the bureau, or of Clara's hints of a secret inexplicable trouble.

'Where is my little friend Clara?'

It was the strong masculine voice of Mrs. Goff in the outer shop.

'Ah, Miss Shelton! I am quite a stranger, aren't I? How goes the world with all of you?' and she advanced towards the fireplace—'Where's my little favourite?'

Clara apparently had fled. Mrs. Goff stood at the fire, warming her back and beaming complacently; and, as she spoke again, there came from the inner shop a most tremendous bang on the table.

'Am I not a stranger?'

'Yes, and that's what I mean you to be,' said Mrs. Wardrop, emerging with the red light of battle in her face. 'You'll be pleased to walk out of that door and keep on the other side of it until further notice.'

'Are you addressing me?' said Mrs. Goff with sturdy defiance. 'If so, you must have gone out of your senses.'

'Oh no I've not. I am mistress here—'

'And I am one of your customers. You must be mad. How dare you? How dare you speak to me in such a manner?'

It was a terrible and totally unintelligible encounter. Mrs. Goff squarely stood her ground on the hearth-rug. Her face was now as red as Mrs. Wardrop's: her square jaw was set, and her eyes glared. For a few moments her strong voice obtained mastery, and she rated Mrs. Wardrop with an overpowering bluster. Facing her antagonist, she seemed like a thick-set, bullying man, who of course must have the upper hand of a shop full of defenceless women.

'I don't care for you or your trumpery custom,' said Mrs. Wardrop resolutely, when at last she obtained a hearing. 'I don't know what you want here, and I don't care to know. But you'll just go outside that door and keep there.'

'I'll, I'll do nothing of the kind,' Mrs. Goff stammered.

'Miss Inman, the door! Now be off with you and think yourself precious lucky if I don't put the detectives after you.'

The battle was over. Astonishing, unintelligible, but Mrs. Goff was beaten. She quailed before Mrs. Wardrop's pointing hand; she opened and shut her mouth spasmodically, but the bluster tailed off into some incoherent nonsense about people repenting of their rude words; and in a few moments Mrs. Goff was gone—never to return.

'There,' said Mrs. Wardrop. 'Henceforth I won't have anybody inside that door who don't come here on legitimate shop business.'

But more than this Mrs. Wardrop added to Vivien next morning. She would not suffer the class of people she had indicated to hang about *outside* the door.

'Miss Shelton. You must tell that friend of yours to keep away altogether. I'm not going to have this shop get a bad name—for anybody.'

Last night Mr. Stanford had again played escort, and the proprietor had seen him waiting. She was now standing with Vivien by the window. It was a wretched morning—not quite a thaw, not quite a frost, raw and chill, with not sufficient fog to justify them in turning on the lamp switches—and in the dull light she looked at her assistant with a sidelong scrutiny of curious wistful intentness. She had spoken severely, as she always spoke now, but in a low voice; and she seemed to have taken an opportunity to give the reprimand when the others were occupied.

'You know your own business I suppose—but, well, you must make other arrangements. I can't have him here. It looks bad—you understand.'

Vivien, with one hand on the oak panel, turned her head away to hide her tears. It was a horrible humiliation to have to justify oneself to this vulgar woman—more humiliating still to appear to crave her aid. But the power of the woman as shown with Mrs. Goff had seemed of such volume.

'I must say'—and then Mrs. Wardrop paused—'But there—I don't want to pry into your affairs.'

'Oh Mrs. Wardrop—you don't understand. I can't prevent his coming. I have tried. I never want to see him—'

'Oh bosh.'

Mrs. Wardrop had again scrutinised her assistant's face as it turned towards her; but that faint wistfulness now vanished and she shrugged her shoulders scornfully.

'It's sheer rubbish to talk to me like that,' said Mrs. Wardrop. 'If you've quarrelled with him—why send him packing; but so long as you are friends, don't humbug like that. Of course you can prevent his coming here if you want to, and you must do it. I never heard such rubbish'; and Mrs. Wardrop left Vivien drying her eyes by the window.

But ere this cold half-lit day was over, something very like a judgment of fate fell upon Mrs. Wardrop, to punish her for her cruel injustice in saying that of course a man can be kept at a respectful distance if it is desirable to keep him there.

Coming up from tea, Vivien found her employer talking to a man in the front shop. He was a grey-haired, red-faced man in a long drab coat, with a racing-glass hanging over his shoulder, and a large bunch of violets in his button-hole. He was talking loudly; he had dropt his brown hat, and a glove which Mrs. Wardrop stooped and picked up; and in a moment one realised the horrible fact that he was half tipsy. The shop was empty, but Mrs. Wardrop's eyes roved about her in agitation. She was speaking almost in a whisper.

'Hush. Not now. Tell me all about it later.'

Vivien hurried away to the back shop, where, out of sight, the other girls stood listening. It was impossible not to hear all the man said.

'No—but I want you to understand—when I got to Sandown first thing I said was, "There'll be no racing to-day." *You* never saw such going. Crossed the course by the ditch—It was just as slippy as be damned—Nearly slip myself. They ought never to have started 'em—The mare's all I ever thought her. Not mare's fault, but the dam-fools of—'

'Yes, yes, I understand. But go away now.' Mrs. Wardrop's imploring whisper could be plainly heard. In one of the big cheval glasses they could see her holding him by the front of his coat. 'Please go away now. I promise to do what I can —later—yes—I promise.'

Then Mrs. Wardrop came to the back shop.

But the man followed her. Slightly lurching, he spoke now with brutal violence.

'Oh be damned to that—Don't I tell you I want the money now? It's now or never—to get the price. It's a dead snip —pull me straight. Don't tell me you're such a stingy beast as to let me go to the devil for fifty quid.'

'I swear to you I haven't got it. But I'll see what I can do,' and Mrs. Wardrop laid her hand on his arm. 'For heaven's sake go away now—'

Then the man called her stingy again: using this time a word more opprobrious than beast; and, shaking his arm free, pushed her violently from him. His hand was open, but he brutally pushed, almost struck her, on the breast, and sent her reeling.

The horrified girls sprang between them: Miss Inman and Vivien, clinging to his arm, pulled him round until he faced the door again; Clara gave a scream; Marian was stooping over Mrs. Wardrop, who had stumbled to a chair and now lay in a vast huddled heap with her arms across the table, hiding her face on her arms; and then the man lurched away, and disappeared through the swing door.

'Oh my God, my God,' sobbed Mrs. Wardrop. 'This is the end.'

All her fortitude was gone. The valiant strength, the sturdy independence, the fury and the force in a moment had been swept away and she lay before them, an immense and most pitiful figure: a sobbing, hysterical mass of suffering womanhood.

'Oh my God, what I have done for that man! Seventy pounds he had from me yesterday. A'most every penny this shop has made in the last five years that man has had and squandered.—And now—my God—he strikes me before you all —throwing my love in my face to call me—'

And with both hands poor Mrs. Wardrop beat upon her table, now moaning, sobbing, choking in hysteria.

But a customer was waiting. She had come in unobserved. No one could say how long she had been there when Vivien went to her.

'What is it?' the customer asked in a frightened voice.

'What is it? Not an accident? Can I be of any use? Shall I go for a doctor?'

'No,' said Vivien breathlessly. 'No thank you. But I fear we can't serve you. We are in trouble for the moment—Bad news. Nothing to do with the business. Private trouble. Do you mind?' and she ushered the scared customer to the door.

'Shut it,' called Miss Inman. 'Bolt it. Pull down all the blinds.'

'Oh my God—my God, my God,' howled Mrs. Wardrop.

'Turn off the window lights,' called Miss Inman—'Miss Draper, Miss Carey, let's get her into the trying-room and put her on the divan. She'll be more comfortable there. She'll be better directly. Never mind the salts now. Get your arms right under her.'

In this manner Vivien, obeying the second in command, who was now acting as chief, closed the shop at 5.17 P.M., nearly three hours before the regular closing time.

Next morning Mrs. Wardrop made no allusion to this poignantly horrible scene, but sat at her table as though nothing in the least unusual had occurred. Vivien, stealing a glance now and then at her heavy face—the coarse mask of business life—felt pity, contrition, and shame. The poor soul was not after all a stinge: she was a martyr.

XIX

'THERE,' said Mrs. Kearsley. 'What did I tell you—about hoarding of 'em? Now you'll believe'; and she showed the white and grey specks of mildew where the last sardine had lain in the tin.'

'There. Right on top of your chill you've just poisoned yourself.'

Vivien was desperately sick; and when she coughed she was seized with sharp pains. She had caught a chill somehow, in her fireless room or in the frost-bound street, and for the last few days had been coughing, with a congested throat and a continuous headache. Now, the mouldy sardine had supervened.

Mrs. Kearsley wanted to send at once for Dr. Quinlan, the clever young physician from Moray Street who attended to sufferers on all the lower and middle rungs of the Social Ladder but Vivien would not permit her to do this.

Next day at the shop she was miserably unfit for duty, but attended to customers all the morning without getting into trouble. One glance at Mrs. Barrett's oily ragout drove her headlong from the luncheon table; and before tea Mrs. Wardrop's suspicions were suddenly aroused, and she was sent home in the disgrace which must of necessity attach to any one too ill to go through the day's work.

That night Vivien thought she was dying. The hard, dry cough came in a kind of recurrent asthmatic spasm, almost suffocating her if she attempted to maintain the recumbent position while the access lasted. She thought if she slept she would certainly be suffocated. Or even awake, in struggling for breath, her heart would be overstrained and cease to beat. It was beating now wildly. She felt it—a hammer frantically beaten—and was utterly appalled and lay shivering in cold fear—in freezing certainty that she would be dead before the wintry sun rose again.

Dr. Quinlan—who had been summoned by Mrs. Kearsley without orders—came in the morning. He was a young man with a very solemn manner, and he listened in grave silence to

all that Mrs. Kearsley desired to tell him before he went upstairs to see his new patient.

She was such a lady—the young lady on the top floor. Hated to give trouble. 'A kind young lady, and a *good* young lady, Dr. Quinlan.' Very different in many respects from *some* young ladies who have had that room. . . .

Vivien was asleep after the long wakeful night, and the sound of the opening and closing door did not rouse her. Dr. Quinlan stood for a few moments looking down upon her. Her face was almost as white as the pillow; the long fingers holding the bed-clothes were too thin. She was muttering in her sleep, and her moving lips were pale and bloodless. It was not a difficult case to diagnose. Hard work, long hours, poor food and insufficient food were at once indicated as typical causes of the trouble.

'Miss Shelton!'

She gave a startled cry on waking to the Doctor's gravely scrutinising gaze.

Dr. Quinlan asked two or three questions; told the patient to sit up in bed; and with his head against her chest asked her to draw a long breath.

'Thank you. Now lie down again.'

As she lay looking at him, she was seized with terror of his preternaturally grave face. The horrible fear of death returned to her with renewed strength.

'You—think—I am very ill,' she gasped.

'Oh no. Nothing much amiss. A little congestion in the bronchial tubes—that produces the choking sensations. But no mischief lower down. Indeed, you have very good lungs.'

'But the heart?'

'Oh, that's all right.'

'It goes so fast. You are sure I haven't got an aneurism? It's beating now *fearfully* fast.'

Dr. Quinlan smiled.

'Then may I get up and go back to my work—if not to-day—to-morrow?'

'No. I'm afraid you must lie quiet—for a week at least.'

'Oh, I can't. I simply *can't*.'

He looked at her attentively, with kind, thoughtful eyes.

'You know—The cough is nothing. But you are completely run down. Only rest can put you right. Your work I fear is rather hard.'

'I'm in a shop—Mrs. Wardrop's in Sloane Street.'

'So I understood—from your landlady. No doubt the work is exhausting. Now I will tell you what you ought to do. I

can understand that it may not be convenient—but you ought, if possible, to take a holiday in the country.'

'Oh, I couldn't do that.'

'No? Then you ought to make yourself as comfortable as possible here—Your landlady must feed you up with all the nourishing things she can get for you—and nurse you in her spare time, and keep a fire going, if she can—conveniently.'

It was a typical case. In Dr. Quinlan's practice he was perpetually meeting such cases. Every day, and all day long, he was confronted with the impossibility of prescribing the treatment indicated. On more than half of his daily round, the ailment was poverty, and the obvious cure, a little wealth. This young lady with the pretty hair, and the white face, and the grey eyes which had such a childlike intentness in their questioning gaze, was certainly a victim of the common ailment.

He was a kind young doctor and he seemed in no hurry to go.

Vivien, with her terrors exorcised, and unconsciously responding to his friendly interest, answered all his interrogations eagerly. She was careful to say nothing which should convey the idea that incapacity of means would debar her from following any advice he might offer. But she seized upon the word he had himself employed. No, it would not be convenient to do that. It would be extremely inconvenient to lie idle here for any length of time. As soon as possible she must be up and about.

'I see you have plenty of books to amuse yourself with—and good books.'

He had laid down his hat, and, in an absent-minded way, had picked up a volume from his patient's library.

'Carlyle! My favourite author.'

'Is he? I'm not sure he isn't mine. No. I don't mean that. But he *is* magnificent.'

In a moment they were talking about books: exchanging opinions, sounding each other's enthusiasms with invisible literary stethoscopes. It greatly surprised him, he confessed with *naïveté*, to meet a young lady of such catholic tastes. Carlyle, for instance, he had always thought was only a man's author.

But this Vivien resented as a man-like slight upon her sex. Why should not girls appreciate and understand things as well as men? Women wrote books themselves—novels especially—as well as, if not better than, men. And, beginning with Miss Edgeworth, she gave him a fine list of women-writers.

'Quite so—quite so,' said Dr. Quinlan.

The good talk about the good books seemed to cheer and rouse her. Gradually as she talked, she sat up in bed again, with knees drawn up and the bedclothes held under her chin with both hands. Dr. Quinlan, watching her pale face in its frame of tumbling brown hair, was pleased to observe the animation. When they came to speak of Mr. Dickens and Mr. Thackeray the eyes sparkled and a faint colour returned to the white cheeks. An organisation in which the mental held sway over the bodily, thought Dr. Quinlan. After playing with one of the china animals from the mantelpiece, he had slowly subsided into the wicker chair.

But in the midst of their interesting discussion they were interrupted by Mrs. Kearsley.

'You was so long,' said Mrs. Kearsley, looking from her lodger to the young doctor, 'that I begun to get anxious—thinking something must be wrong.'

Dr. Quinlan, slightly disconcerted, gathered together his hat, gloves, and umbrella; and said good morning to his patient.

'Well,' said Mrs. Kearsley when the doctor had gone. 'I never would have expected it of him to stay so long.'

'Why not?' asked Vivien anxiously. 'He won't charge by time, will he?'

In spite of her remonstrances, Dr. Quinlan made her remain in bed day after day. He came every morning, and he never seemed in a hurry; but they had no more long chats. Once, setting his opinion at defiance, she tried to get up and dress. But her legs seemed to be made of india-rubber: she was dizzy and faint in a minute, and compelled to lean against the chest of drawers for support, until she could recover strength to crawl back to bed again. It seemed as though, instead of making her well, the bed itself was the cause of her weakness. Lying there, taking the rest which he had ordered, she had grown weaker and weaker.

And the doctor's bill? It was dreadful to think of what all these visits and so much carefully considered advice would cost. Marian had so frightened her about the remorseless character of doctors and the excessive amount of their charges, that she trembled when she thought of the debt she was incurring.

'What do you think I ought to do?' she inquired of Marian. 'Do you think he would be angry if I asked him how much I owe him up to now? He must know I'm not rich and can't afford to go on like this for ever.'

Marian had so poor an opinion of the medical profession as

a class that she rather thought it would be a good thing to 'tackle' him, as dear Vi suggested. 'It will show him that you don't want to be imposed upon.'

But when Vivien, with much misgiving, finally screwed up her courage to the tackling point, and spoke in a grand way of her account, she caused this doctor to begin to blush and to stammer. It made her blush and stammer to see him, and she was sorry that she had tackled.

He muttered something about his scale—'not excessive in any way—medicines charged extra'—and, still blushing and stammering, hurried away.

'I really think I must trust to his sense of what is right,' she told Marian. 'I was so afraid that I had offended him. And he has been so kind that I wouldn't offend him for worlds.'

Marian came and sat with her nearly every evening.

'What does Mrs. Wardrop say about me? You told her that as soon as I was well enough, I would come back, didn't you? Oh Marian, you do think she'll keep my place open for me?'

'I hope so, dear.'

'Oh, what should I do, if she didn't?'

'But I hope she will, dear.'

Marian hoped. She would never say more than that. She hoped that Mrs. Wardrop would not do so very unkind a thing as to fill a girl's place in the shop while the poor girl lay sick in bed.

On the first Saturday afternoon, Marian came to Marefield Street with a message from Mrs. Wardrop. Mrs. Wardrop expressed sincere regret at Miss Shelton's continued ill-health; she sent her kindest regards; and she begged Miss Shelton to accept her week's salary of one pound although she had not been able to earn it.

Vivien could scarcely believe her ears.

'Oh how good of her—how very, very good.' Her eyes were filled with tears, as she drew out the pound from the folded shop-envelope.

'It is a thing I have never known her do before,' said Marian.

'And Marian, it is a good sign, isn't it? Since she has been so generous in this, I feel sure she won't throw me over. She would never have done it, if she meant to part with me.'

'I do hope that it is a good sign,' said Marian.

'Vi dear,' said Marian, one evening in the following week. 'Now that you are feeling stronger—you do really feel better, don't you, dear?—there is something that I'm very sorry to have to tell you.'

Vivien's lips began to tremble, and she looked at Marian with wide, frightened eyes.

'You know that message of Mrs. Wardrop's—that we hoped was a good sign. It wasn't a good sign. It was a very bad sign. Vi, dear. She has filled your place.'

'Oh Marian!'

'I did all that I could for you, dear. Argued with her, implored her to change her mind, but it was no use. She says she is genuinely fond of you and that you are a really good saleswoman, but you aren't strong enough for the work.'

'Oh, oh, how cruel of her! I *am* strong enough. I've never been ill before.'

'She says you have been *looking* ill, ever since the summer, and of course customers don't like that. I believe she would really have liked to keep you and get rid of Miss Carey—but she said Miss Carey would certainly starve as she's utterly useless and it's simple charity to keep her. And at last she let out that what has really decided her is—Mr. Stanford. She didn't like his way of coming to the shop.'

'But it's wicked to punish me for that. I told her it wasn't my fault.'

'Yes. But she thought that if customers knew of it—Vi, I'll tell you what I really think. I believe that Mrs. Arncliffe talked to her about it.'

'Oh Marian, what shall I do? What shall I do?'

This, as her father once said, was the end of the world for her. It was no use to beg her not to weep about it. Marian had to own that it was a fit and proper occasion for tears. Half that night Vivien lay in the feverish wakefulness of despair. She thought of those sleek and well-loved dogs that she used to see in the Park sitting by their mistresses in the smart victorias; and of how, in imagination, she had seen them lost or stolen. One day, love and luxury; the next, famine and the tin kettle. She had always known that she was like the dogs, with as precarious a hold on comfort and shelter.

What should she do? What could she do? In time, no doubt, she might find some other employment. She would have to accept any menial task. Like Mrs. Carey, she must enter the crowded arena of the bread-winners, and take whatever offered. But meanwhile, who in all the world would help her? She might starve before she could begin to earn her daily bread.

She could sell her books, china animals, photograph frames—and clothes, but she would be spending her last chance of decent employment. First the ermine, then the evening-dress

—those she could spare; but when she began to dissipate the rest of her wardrobe she would be surely sinking, sinking down towards the lower rungs of her social ladder. And the end would come. If not this time, then a little later, when employment failed. In imagination she evoked a ghastly picture of the end of all things—starvation. Papa would hear of it, even in his club perhaps. Death of a girl in a garret above a greengrocer's in Marefield Street. She had read things just like it. 'The deceased was greatly emaciated. On the under-linen the name V. Shelton was decipherable. The coroner requested the reporters to give publicity to the circumstance with a view to possible identification!'

With open eyes, she lay in the darkness, like a lonely child terrifying herself with her own imaginings; and, gradually, from her very real troubles she drifted on to a sea of morbid dread. From the torture of facts, she dragged out of the darkness all the infinite torment of fancy. What that was ghastly and thought-sickening to think of, might not now befall her? She was alone in the darkness, crouching down at the feet of the monstrous veiled figure. It was the horror of life itself. She was alone, an infinitely small speck, less than the size of an ant, upon the immeasurable, limitless floor of the universe, called upon to do battle with the colossal, overwhelming powers of darkness and death. Lying thus, with open eyes, in the fever which she herself had induced, that old forgotten dream of her childhood had returned in this new waking form, and was holding her spellbound in its unutterable, maddening horror.

But at last through exhaustion she fell asleep, and when she awoke in the morning, to the daylight and to Mrs. Kearsley standing by her bedside with tea and bread and butter, the horror had vanished and she was most thoroughly ashamed of herself for her cowardice.

As she ate her breakfast and talked to Mrs. Kearsley, all her courage came back, and she felt more and more ashamed of herself.

Why should she be afraid? If Mrs. Wardrop did not want her, there must be others who would. Every day more and more of the amateur shops were being opened—tea shops, flower shops, and bonnet shops. And, beyond all these, there were the *real* shops. She was a good saleswoman. She could soon learn to sell other things—as well as she had sold blouses. In some one of the miles and miles of the real shops in the mighty labyrinth, she could certainly find a place at the counter. She would have her food in a real shop regular and good too; and she smiled as she thought of Miss Crofts. Miss Crofts

would help her to find work, even Mrs. Barrett would lend a helping hand—if indeed she was such a baby that she could not help herself.

But the doctor's grave face became more preternaturally solemn than ever as he held her hand and felt her pulse and looked at her flushed cheeks.

'How is this?' said Dr. Quinlan. 'What have you been doing to upset yourself like this? Getting up again yesterday, or what?'

Then she told him that she had passed a restless night after receiving some rather bad news.

'You know, the loss of my situation is a serious thing to me,' she explained. 'But of course I shall be able to find something else to do, before long.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' said Dr. Quinlan. As though unconsciously, he had sunk down into the wicker chair; and, with his hands folded across his knee, he now again began to blush and stammer.

'Er—Miss Shelton—I hope you won't consider it impertinence of me to—to appear to take interest in what are—naturally your private affairs.'

Vivien looked scared.

'But, the fact is, I have been thinking about you a great deal—about your case generally. Really I haven't been able to dismiss it from my mind.'

'It's very kind of you—but I—'

'If hearing that you weren't wanted any more at your—er—shop,' said Dr. Quinlan very awkwardly—'has so greatly upset you, I can only suppose that this sort of work is really—a necessity to you. I know this is no business of mine, and I hope you won't be angry with me, but, as a doctor, one is forced to think about one's patients.'

Then, wearing down his embarrassment, he told her that he was assured that shop-work was not good for her. She wanted, at any rate for the present, an easier task; she wanted, most urgently, fresh air and gentle exercise and a great deal of nourishment; and she ought to use every endeavour to obtain these things.

'Thinking about it, as I must say I have very carefully, it occurs to me, Miss Shelton—forgive me if I seem to pay a compliment—that with your cultivation and natural cleverness, you would be well suited to act as companion or secretary to some lady—'

'Oh, it's hopeless to try for that sort of thing. There are hundreds and hundreds always trying. And so much is expected

—modern languages, shorthand, typewriting. You've no idea how ignorant I am, really.'

'Are you?' said Dr. Quinlan smiling; and then he looked grave again. 'Miss Shelton—I don't ask from any idle curiosity—I wish you'd tell me all about yourself. Your parents, for instance. Are they living? If you don't mind, I wish you'd tell me all about yourself.'

'It's cert'nly to be hoped, miss,' said Mrs. Kearsley, after the doctor had gone, 'as you said yourself, that he don't intend to charge by the time, for he's been up here an hour and over.'

Three or four days later, Dr. Quinlan paid another very long visit. It was in the afternoon, and Vivien was up and dressed, sitting by her tiny fire. She was very weak still. Her face was nearly as white as the ermine tippet in which she had wrapped herself; her hands looked thin and bloodless as they held the arms of the wicker chair. But she was getting better, her physician said. She need have no doubt of that. Then, since the wicker chair was occupied, he gradually subsided upon the bed.

Sitting on the bed and playing with his gloves, he began to talk to Vivien of her private affairs again, leading up to them in a roundabout manner by talking of his own private affairs.

'My part of the world is down south, Miss Shelton—Hawkridge—quite a small village, not far from the coast. Very pretty neighbourhood and very good air. My father was doctor there—I was too young to carry on the practice when he died. But my uncle took it over. You know, for a man with any ambition, it's just being buried alive. I am not by any means without ambition,' and Dr. Quinlan smiled. 'The great lady of the neighbourhood is Lady Colwyn. You have heard of Lady Colwyn?'

Vivien confessed that the name was unfamiliar. Dr. Quinlan seemed disappointed.

'She is a very great lady, you know. Great wealth, an immense estate—stretching for miles and miles, you know,—the Marquis of Carabas to any stranger down there.'

'La Marquise de Carabas, sire, an it please you!' said Vivien glibly.

'Yes. I assure you, if you had been born within the shadow of her greatness—as I was—it would seem incredible to you that there was anybody in the world who had *not* heard of her.'

He seemed quite disappointed that the fame of her ladyship had never reached his patient.

'She lives in great state.—She is quite of the old school. A

character—my father always said. My uncle—Dr. James—he married my father's sister—my mother died when I was a child. —Well, my uncle attends at the great house professionally—goes there every day throughout the year. In the old days, these great ladies always had their own doctors to see them every day.'

'Had they?' Vivien was growing weary of Lady Colwyn and Dr. Quinlan's native village.

'Well, Lady Colwyn is accustomed to have a sort of companion or secretary with her. Quite by chance, I heard from my uncle that this post is now vacant. And I have ventured to write to him—I trust you won't think that I have taken an unpardonable liberty—suggesting—in fact as strongly as I could —that Lady Colwyn would be very fortunate if she could induce you to accept the position.'

'Oh, how kind of you.'

'I'm glad you are not angry with me. I think my uncle has some influence with her ladyship. I know *he* thinks so. At any rate, he writes to say that she will be in London almost immediately—for a couple of nights—and that she will see you, at the house in Dover Street.'

Then, sitting on the bed until the dusk invaded the room and Vivien lit the candles, he solemnly advised her to use all her intelligence in the interview with this great lady. It would be so exceedingly fortunate if she could obtain the situation. He had spoken of Lady Colwyn inducing her to come; but now he looked at the matter from the other side. Probably no words could exaggerate the importance of Lady Colwyn in her own estimation. You could not be too cautious while in her presence. A careless word, a thoughtless gesture might outrage some old-fashioned susceptibility, and the great lady would turn against you, quite unreasonably no doubt, but irrecoverably. There was a confidential servant, a sort of chief maid, a Mrs. Mapleton —and one would have wished, had it been possible, to get hold of her and win her to one's side. His uncle had often told him that this Mrs. Mapleton had unbounded influence with her noble mistress. But Dr. James had done all that was in his power, and his nephew did not for a moment doubt that Miss Shelton, if only she would be careful, would make a favourable impression.

He was keenly anxious that Miss Shelton might not lose such a wonderful chance.

'How can I ever thank you for your kindness to me?' said Vivien when Dr. Quinlan was leaving her.

It was a grim old house in Dover Street; and Lady Colwyn

was a grim old woman. She was white-haired; but she had strong, dark eyebrows, which she drew downward frowningly over keen, resolute eyes as she stared and questioned. She was all in black, with a curious, little beaded cap on her white hair; and Vivien thought she looked exactly like an ogress or a wicked old princess in a fairy tale.

She asked innumerable questions, rapidly, abruptly, in a strong firm voice—the voice of command of the great lady who began commanding sixty or seventy years ago, and who in all her long life has never once been disobeyed.

'How old are you? How tall are you? You look ill. You have been ill, they tell me. But you are not naturally sickly? Mapleton, where are those letters?'

A middle-aged woman, who had ushered Vivien into her ladyship's presence, came forward with papers in her hand; placed them on the table by the side of her ladyship's chair; and turned on the electric light in a reading-lamp. Vivien, glancing shyly round the room, observed that it was lofty and grand and forbidding, of the old school, like its owner. Dark walls with carved and gilded panels; pictures of landscapes and still life, dingy indistinguishable old masters; gilt console-tables; and an immense marble chimney-piece with a wood fire crackling and spluttering feebly on the wide hearth—it was grand and unhomelike, like one of the smaller rooms in Hampton Court Palace.

'Yes, yes,' said Lady Colwyn, rapidly scanning a letter. 'They tell me that you are well educated and intelligent—clever. I don't want cleverness. But you can write a decent hand? And you are able to read aloud without blundering. Sit down over there and write something. Then read aloud. Get the *Times*, Mapleton, and open it at the parliamentary reports.'

So then Vivien wrote and read; and although her ladyship did not say so, she seemed satisfied with the result of these tests.

'Now go out and come in again. Let me see if you know how to come into a room. I don't suppose that is included in a girl's education nowadays.'

As the old woman ordered her about, Vivien was forcibly reminded of Mrs. Wardrop examining her on appro.; and all at once Lady Colwyn used almost Mrs. Wardrop's own words.

'I suppose you understand that if I wanted a thousand girls instead of one, I could get them before nightfall.'

'Yes, I am sure you could,' said Vivien humbly.

Then Lady Colwyn briefly described the duties of the post. To drive out with her ladyship, to dress and behave in a becom-

ing manner, to act as secretary now and then, to be unobtrusively useful as opportunity offered.

'Oh,' said Vi eagerly. 'I would do anything in the world you wanted.'

'I want you to listen, and not to interrupt,' said Lady Colwyn with an ominous frown and a steady stare. 'Can you do that?'

Vivien bowed humbly.

'You would have very little to do—but you would have to know how to be in the way when I wanted you, and not in the way when I didn't. Mapleton here is a good attentive creature, but Mapleton is only a servant,' said her ladyship, with, as Vivien thought, rather brutal frankness. 'She is a very faithful servant, but there are occasions when I require some one more than a mere waiting-woman.'

'A lady-in-waiting?' Vivien hazarded with a sudden reckless desire to use a facetious phrase, and prevent the conversation from making Mrs. Mapleton uncomfortable.

'A lady-in-waiting. Precisely. That exactly expresses it.'

And Lady Colwyn flashed a glance of totally unexpected approval. She repeated the words as though with pleasure in their aptness.

'You would be a lady-in-waiting. Neither more nor less.'

Vivien smiled inwardly. It was probably impossible to exaggerate the importance of the great lady in her own estimation!

'And now,' said Lady Colwyn, 'about this shop? How came your father—he is living, I understand—to permit you to be in a shop?'

'He is poor. I had to earn my living. He could not prevent it.'

'It was a milliner's?'

Then Vivien gave an account of Mrs. Wardrop's establishment: with considerable guile, as she hoped, weighing upon its amateur character. It was not an ordinary shop—a shop kept by a lady.

'Don't talk nonsense,' said Lady Colwyn authoritatively. 'Ladies don't keep shops.'

'Oh, but I assure you they do—heaps and heaps of them.'

With a wave of the hand, Lady Colwyn checked her.

'If flat contradiction is a habit of yours, I will detain you no longer.'

'I am very sorry. No doubt you are right. But they think themselves ladies.'

'A great many people do that nowadays,' said Lady Colwyn sternly.

Vivien felt sure now that all hope was futile. But Lady

Colwyn, frowning and severe, did not at once bring the interview to an end.

'I will take into consideration what you have told me—but do not count upon being engaged. By the way, how am I to know that you are speaking the truth—that you are the person you pretend to be, and not an impostor?'

Vivien had flushed indignantly, but now she was fumbling in her pocket. It was a great crisis in the game of life. Now or never must be the moment to play a trump card. No one could say that she had not bottled it carefully; but now, extracting it from a folded tissue paper, she played out her ace of trumps.

'What is this?' asked Lady Colwyn, looking at the card as it lay on the little table at her elbow.

'My father's card.'

Lady Colwyn, picking up the card, perceptibly started, as though surprised. Vivien felt sure that the name of papa's club had produced its due impression.

'Oh! your father's card! Rifle Brigade. Quite so. Now, can you tell me anything as to the position of your father's club? For instance, where is its place? How does it stand with regard to the other clubs?'

'It stands very high,' said Vivien eagerly; 'at the very top. It is quite one of the best clubs.'

'I don't mean that. I know all about that. I only put the question to test you. What I mean is: *Where* is it? In what street?'

'Oh, in Pall Mall. If you were coming from St. James's Palace, it would be on your right hand, after you pass the War Office.'

'Yes; that will do.' And Lady Colwyn sat thinking for a few minutes. The trump card seemed to be producing a doubtful effect. Perhaps it roused the question: If the father could afford to belong to so reputable a club, how came he to permit his daughter to fall into the degradation of a shop?

'You must give me a reference—do you understand? One reference. Some one who knows all about you, and can vouch for you. Don't pretend you are all alone in the world.'

'I am—nearly.'

'Any respectable person will do—not the lady who keeps the shop—but bankers. No, not a banker. Your father's agents, solicitors.'

'Solicitors! My father's solicitors *were* Messrs. Clifford, Atkinson, and George.'

'Mapleton! weren't they the people employed by Lord Stonehaven in that dispute about the Loch Fergus property? . . .

No. You never remember anything . . . Lincoln's Inn Fields. Yes. Those are the people. They will do.'

Ten days after this interview, when both she and her kind friend, Dr. Quinlan, had renounced all hope, Vivien received an intimation that the post of lady-in-waiting to the Lady Colwyn of Hawkridge, at a salary of thirty pounds per annum, was hers. Two five-pound notes were enclosed in the envelope, and she was instructed to buy herself a black walking-dress and a black evening-dress of the plainest description, and then proceed to Hawkridge.

XX

LADY COLWYN lived in solitary state in her splendid house of Hawkridge. In the midst of her vast estate, in the midst of her own people, she was a grim old queen, stern and hard and unbending, ruling her little kingdom with an iron hand. She was a great lady of a bygone age: a hundred years at least behind the times. Solid pomp and settled grandeur seemed to her natural and fitting. She was a just but unbending landlord, showing no mercy, thinking none should be craved; but in her own great house a multitude of idle, pampered retainers robbed her and cheated her, in a petty menial way, unchallenged, unrebuked. It was a part of the ancient traditions—waste in the castle, want in the cottage.

Into this new strange world of countless pounds a week, Vivien in her hour of need had been swept. Coming from London, Marefield Street, and all its sordid cares, it seemed to her that in two short hours she had passed from real life into dreamland.

At the little wayside station, where the January sunshine had a sparkling brightness, and where there was a perfume of peat in the keen, light air, the greatness of the great lady seemed at once to fall upon her and envelop her. A footman in sombre black livery took her in charge as though he had been a polite policeman; grooms and porters wrestled for her shocking old trunk; the stationmaster bowed her through the booking-office; clerks and signalmen stopped work to watch her progress. Outside, big champing horses pawed and fretted to whirl her away in the dark-coloured brougham, which swayed and lurched on its cee-springs as she took her seat. Through five miles of fertile plain, past scattered farms, by schools and alms-houses, by mills and mill-streams, over stone bridges across running water, in shadowy beechwoods, and out again among the broad fields, the big horses carried her swiftly; and then, with unchecked swinging trot, they were climbing the hilly street of Hawkridge village. Women on shop steps, children in doorways bowed and curtseyed; postmen with the mailcart outside the post-office touched their caps; from one end of the street

to the other, all who saw ceased working, playing, or lounging, and made obeisance to the carriage of the great lady—did homage to the flicker of the coronet on the varnished panels as it flashed by.

'The Marquise de Carabas, sire, an it please you!' thought Vivien smiling.

At the top of the village street, between the church and vicarage, there were iron gates with coats-of-arms in their heraldic colours, and golden scrolls and crowns; white lodges; and a man, in the same black livery as the coachman's and the footman's, waiting to close the gates when the carriage had passed into the park. Then, almost directly, as they drove among trees, she saw it—the great house. It was only a glimpse through the bare branches—a low range of red-brick buildings looking exactly like St. James's Palace, with a flagstaff, and a coloured flag like the royal standard floating above dark old turrets and battlements. But in a moment, as the gravel road turned in the wood, a fresh wonder unfolded itself. Buckingham Palace—perhaps smaller and lower, but still Buckingham Palace itself—had been added as a wing, or rather, built on as a gigantic extension of the older fabric. White, glaring, incongruous, but stupendously grand!

That was her first impression of the great house—the two palaces rolled into one to make it.

When they emerged from the wood, there were old garden walls, gardeners' cottages, and more red-brick buildings: dark and dignified and strange. Through a noble arch she could see the big quadrangle of the stables: men washing carriages under a glass roof, men leading horses beneath a low doorway. Then there were more walls of still more gardens on one side, and on the other, conifers, clumps of rhododendrons, and level turf. Then came low walls of stone, flagged paths, balustrades and stone urns; and then a screen or open cloister of ornate masonry, through which the carriage drove into the stately outer court, and drew up with a clatter on the pavement beneath the great porch.

If only Clara could have seen it. Only Clara could have properly appreciated the pomp of it.

Within, it was a treasure-house like Kensington Museum.

It surpassed belief. A great hall, painted ceilings, tapestry; servants in the sombre black livery; trophies of swords and lances and armour; a marble staircase, wide and palatial, red carpet on the white steps; immense corridors, with bronzes and statuary, gilded chairs standing outside great doors of the endless reception-rooms—chairs more regal far than the chair in Mrs.

Wardrop's window:—as swiftly she noted stray items in the sum of its magnificence, there came to her the thought of how many pounds a week it must all imply. Incalculable! Inconceivable!

Lady Colwyn, old and white and forbidding, in the last of her own suite of rooms, checked enthusiasm, chilled warmth of expression.

'There is no occasion to thank me. I engaged you because I thought you would suit me. I hope I have not deceived myself.'

Vivien had made a little speech, composed in the train: expressing her gratitude for having been selected from among the thousand. But indeed there was no occasion for it. Lady Colwyn kept a companion as she kept a groom of the chambers or a house steward—as a necessity of her station. When one went, another must be procured. That the companion should be selected for companionable qualities had probably never occurred to her.

After the speech which had fallen so flat, Vivien had a duty to perform. Dr. Quinlan had given her a paper with certain directions as to diet and other matters, and had made her promise that she would deliver it at once into her ladyship's own hands.

'My doctor said that there were things that I ought to have just at first—until I am quite strong again—I hope it won't give you any trouble.'

Lady Colwyn took the paper from its envelope. Vivien had not read it.

'And he asks permission to come and see me—just to see how I am going on—two or three times. May he do so?'

'Why not? But are you still ailing? They told me you were naturally healthy.'

'So I am. I've never been ill before.'

'Good. I hate sickly people.'

Through the window Vivien could see new wonders: an immense formal garden, terraces, stone stairs, fish ponds, cypress and yew. Below the garden, two wings of a gravel drive joined before iron gates that were apparently grander than those in the village street. Beyond the gates the road stretched away into the distance, first between conifers, then through an avenue of elms. This was the state approach, the entry of ceremony, leading straight and true to the centre of the splendid Italian front. Beyond the avenue, more gates, a bridge with statues, and the river; the park with its fringe of beech woods; the rich plain; far-off hamlets; church towers—and all, all of it, as far as eye could reach, belonged to Lady Colwyn.

'The young man must be mad!' said her ladyship, reading Dr. Quinlan's regimen. '"A fire in bedroom, butcher's meat —at two meals—glass of port at dinner. If possible a room with sunshine on it—part of day,"' and Lady Colwyn tossed the paper away contemptuously.

Turning from the window, Vivien laughed for the first time in her new home. Certainly the owner of so much magnificence would not allow a dependent to be in want for butcher's meat.

'He speaks of you as though you were a servant going to some poor parsonage,' said Lady Colwyn. 'Ask for anything you require. Of course you are to be treated as though you were a member of my family as long as you remain under my roof.'

Lady Colwyn said this with a very grand air, and Vivien felt very grateful. The thought had been in her mind that it would be dreadful if the servants were rude to her, wishing to deal with her as one of themselves, unwilling to believe or admit that she differed from them in any essential. But now her status had been made clear. The great lady would protect her from the familiarity of inferiors.

Nevertheless, this Mrs. Mapleton, the confidential maid, showing her to her room, was not treating her with respect.

'I hope as you and I'll be good friends,' said Mrs. Mapleton. 'Mind you, she's a tartar, but *I* understand her ways. . . . Yes, all this part was built eighteen twenty about. The old part is Henry the Eight, added to under William and under Anne.'

Vivien felt that she would be forced to assert herself, to summon energy ere long to crush this waiting-woman by a fitting rebuke. But for the moment she postponed the unwelcome task.

As a wonder outside oneself the house absorbed her. It was like a town: a lesser labyrinth than the great one she had left. There was a disused chapel. 'They were Roman Catholics in those days,' said Mrs. Mapleton, pointing from a gallery across the shadowy vault to carved and painted figures above the altar. 'Nothing's been touched.' At the end of a corridor there was a hall with black and white marble pavement. It was the beginning of the older building. A shallow flight of half a dozen steps brought one into it. A huge gilded lantern hung from the roof; the walls were panelled to a height of six or seven feet; and above the panelling was tapestry. Another stone staircase of two flights, with gilded iron-work on one hand and a red silken rope on the other, led one out of this hall. 'That's

the dining-room,' said Mrs. Mapleton, 'where you 'll dine. Her ladyship dines quite early in her own apartments.' Vivien peeped into a low dark room. It was smaller than she had anticipated. 'It's not the dining-*hall* you understand. That's never used except there's royalty present.'

Her own room, although in the older part of the house, was most spacious and splendid. It would be gentle exercise to move about it: to go to Lady Colwyn's apartments would be a good walk. An enormous bed, inlaid rosewood cabinets, sofas, armchairs, a writing-table with stores of the coroneted paper, thick as parchment, glazed and smooth—paper to make letter-writing a delight, a good fire—she hurried to and fro in rapture, examining the contents of the room, mentally comparing it with her attic in Marefield Street. Dr. Quinlan would have been satisfied: she was well lodged. Through one of the windows, she could see another garden with lawns and a sun-dial, and the dark mass of the old house—an orangery, battlemented roofs, and tower-like chimney-stacks.

The idle, unoccupied servants, drawn by curiosity, lay in wait about the house to get sight of the new comer. She was young, it was said. How long would she stay? Behind doors, and on the hidden staircases that ran from floor to floor, they lurked, gossiping and laughing. From this world behind the scenes, bursts of vulgar voices—growling voices of men, shrill voices of women—floated into the silent dignity of the great corridors. Who was she? Where had she come from? Then the evidence of the shabby box was noisily considered. Never had so flagrantly mean a piece of luggage ridden in the luggage-cart to Hawkridge. No doubt some poor wretch discovered by Mrs. Mapleton to aid and abet in her espionage and general villainy! But she would not stay long. The dreaded and hated Mrs. Mapleton could brook no rival for long in the sacred circle about the person of her mistress. Of all the ladies-in-waiting whom they remembered none had held her honoured place for long. From highest to lowest, from Mr. Richards, the house steward, to the last little slut in the outermost lobby of the kitchens, all the servants hated and dreaded Mrs. Mapleton, the upstart favourite of the great lady.

Vivien, sitting alone at dinner, waited upon by silent, watchful men, helping herself to daintiest butcher's meat from silver dishes, thought of the Mentone Restaurant. And, hitherto, she had believed the Mentone to be the home of luxury, the eighteen-penny table d'hôte the summit of the attainable in delicate feeding! Wonderful!

On the table there were wax candles in silver candelabra—but above sideboards, and in a corner where leather screens concealed the door through which the footmen came and went, the electric light blazed with patchy brilliance. Here and there upon the panelled walls were pictures—portraits of men and women in powder or in wigs; on one wall were bare spaces: expanses of red baize in gilt frames. She could not guess the meaning of them. But the silence of the room oppressed her. Mr. Jarvis, the butler, and his black-stockinged assistants flitted to and fro like attentive phantoms. The silver dishes seemed to float from hand to hand; ghostly figures appeared to rise through the floor and look at her curiously and then vanish. There was never a rattle of falling knives, never a clink of plates or tinkle of glasses. She alone disturbed the stillness, and when she broke a piece of toast the sound was startlingly intense. When one thought of the hubbub of the Mentone, it seemed like a meal in dreamland—vague and unreal, an illusion which would soon fade.

But, Mrs. Mapleton, coming in at the end was real—painfully real, as, grossly familiar, impudently at her ease, she drew one of the big chairs across the polished floor and took her seat at the table.

'Ah—you 've got your glass of port wine—that 's right. Good evening, Mr. Jarvis. I hope you have been treating her well.'

Mr. Jarvis, hatchet-faced and glum, turned his back and trembled with wrath; the tall footmen shrugged their shoulders and pallidly glared at the insolent intruder. By what right did she stalk into Mr. Jarvis's dining-room without by your leave or for your leave? It was what she was always doing—interfering with others in their places. It was the thing which these pampered menials could not brook—interference from another servant. My kitchens, My scullery, My stillroom—in each department, its head was supreme and would accept of no interference. It was the point of honour of their menial world—rather death than submit to that. But in the presence of this lady-companion, an honorary member of the ruling caste, they were at Mrs. Mapleton's mercy.

'Well, how do you find yourself now? All the better for a good dinner I dessay.'

A spot of colour had come to each of Vivien's pale cheeks. The moment for battle had arrived, and she must not shrink from it.

'Drink up your wine,' said Mrs. Mapleton. 'There 's plenty more where that come from; and a second glass won't do you no harm. And I don't mind if I keep you company. Mr. Jarvis—'

Vivien had risen, and she spoke in a low but firm voice. She was rather breathless, but she chose her words carefully.

'No doubt—you mean well. But it is an impertinence to speak to me like this—You forget—I am not one of your fellow-servants'; and then with slow dignity she moved towards the door.

'Upon my word,' gasped Mrs. Mapleton, pushing back her chair. She had turned very red, and in her anger she was beginning to make ugly, cat-like throat-noises. 'Oh don't let me disturb you pray.'

But Vivien had gone. She was quite breathless, shaken by the effort of battle. Yet what else could she have done? She must fight for her own hand. Life would be unbearable if she were forced to support the degrading familiarity of all these servants.

Mrs. Mapleton was left behind to discuss the matter with the butler and the footmen—now freed from all constraint, and able to offer candid opinions.

Raging and raving through the long corridors, Mrs. Mapleton breathed her fury in spluttering cat-like cries. 'Oh! Minx to lord it over *me*. You shall pay for this. You 'll pay me for this, y' impident 'ussy. *I*'ll be even with you.'

The butler and footmen made the glass tinkle in their delight. About the great house, behind the doors and up and down the service stairways, the glorious tidings flashed like fire. The favourite had been brought to book at last. The old cat had singed her fur. She had asked for it and got it, etc. Already, in halls and kitchens, Vivien's carefully chosen words were being repeated, were being learnt by heart. Bursts of happy voices—growling laughter of men, squealing laughter of women—floated from the stone passages, swept through every open door. Men and women lurked, and longed to catch a glimpse of her—the owner of the shabby box who had taught the old cat a lesson.

Her first evening with Lady Colwyn was typical of many evenings.

For a long time they sat on each side of the fire in silence. Her ladyship was knitting. Every now and then the needles ceased to work and her ladyship looked into the fire reflectively. In these pauses Vivien made some attempts at conversation, but met with no response.

'I do not know if you are fond of cards,' said Vivien, 'but I could play piquet with you if you liked.'

'Thank you,' said Lady Colwyn, 'I do not play cards.'

Then Vivien began to yawn. In the drowsy warmth of the splendid room, with her thoughts wandering away and losing themselves beneath a fog of vague fancies while she watched the moving needles, it was becoming difficult to keep awake.

'Would you care for me to read to you while you work?' she asked, rousing herself.

'No,' said Lady Colwyn. 'Not yet. Later.'

At last the reading began. It was a new and most disappointing kind of reading to Vivien. She had rather hoped that the book would be a novel—one of her favourites perhaps. But it was not a book at all. It was the stupid old *Times* newspaper, with the contents of which her ladyship played a sort of game.

Vivien was instructed to begin with the small paragraphs immediately below the court news—Mrs. Jones has arrived in Berkeley Square, and all that sort of thing. But at the first name known to her ladyship, she held up her hand and stopped the reading.

'Lord Keighley! Ah, that is quite a new creation. Who was he? I forget.'

Then Vivien was told to go to a revolving book-table and to select the necessary volume of reference. With something akin to horror she saw that this piece of furniture contained nothing but those books beloved by her father—peerages, county families, army lists, etc.

Looking up Lord Keighley in the *Peerage* she discovered that his family name was Carpenter.

'Carpenter? What Carpenters I wonder?'

Then in another book the Carpenters were hunted down. And so the reading proceeded: starting again and again, only to be checked by the departure of some train of ideas in her ladyship's mind which brought one back to the books. Whenever the newspaper began to seem faintly interesting, Vivien was sure to be told to lay it down and fetch a book—to ascertain some dry-as-dust fact: such as the population of Manchester, the age of one of the Queen's great-grandchildren, the average price of a quarter of wheat forty-seven years ago, or the family name of another new peer.

At about ten o'clock her ladyship broke up the sitting. Mrs. Mapleton and an assistant maid came to take her ladyship to bed; doors were opened by the grand men-servants; and in the most solemn and stately manner the little procession passed into her ladyship's sleeping apartment.

That was the end of the night's duty for the lady-in-waiting:

her attendance ceased at the second of the double doors, and there she received her congé.

But to Vivien the crowning wonder of the great house was yet to come.

Ere she herself retired to rest, she ventured to make search for a book to carry with her—some real book to banish the vacant and craving sensations produced by the false books: those receptacles of dust and ashes that formed Lady Colwyn's personal collection. In such a house there must of course be a noble library somewhere hidden.

A prowling footman very readily conducted her along the corridors, past the stone hall and the room in which she had dined, to the library situated in the older part of the building, and, as she surmised with pleasure, at no great distance from her own room.

'I will tell Mr. Frensham to come. Mr. Frensham is the librarian'; and the footman left her, after turning on the electric light near the door.

It was a long, low room: on one side, deep-set windows hidden now by heavy curtains, and between the windows book-shelves from floor to ceiling, with advancing wings that formed little open rooms; on the other side, nothing but books. The electric light only showed her one end of the room. Beyond the second of the jutting book-shelves the darkness closed, and one had the vague impression that in the obscurity the room stretched away to limitless space.

At this lighted end there was a fireplace, with a wood fire now dying out in the huge basket grate. Above the carved oak mantel there was an immense picture, the life-sized portrait of one of the old lords: a soldier, hawk-like and stern, in wig and square-cut coat, with a gigantic hat, and a thin sword pointing at smoke-clouds and battle. This seemed the only picture in the room, and she stood before it—wondering if it was by Reynolds or Gainsborough, or from whose famous brush—before she turned to the endless book-shelves that overpowered and confused by the wealth of close-packed volumes.

Working along the shelves from the door, she found herself in the historical section of the library. History and still history, in dull old calf: musty old history, ancient forgotten books that she had never heard of—not a name that she knew. She wondered if these rusty historians would ever be done with, if she would ever reach the Macaulays, Carlyles, and Greens. But suddenly, as she turned, she started violently. An elderly man was standing beside her.

'Oh, how you made me jump!'

'Did I, miss? Very sorry, I am sure,' and the old fellow rubbed his hands together and chuckled.

This Mr. Frensham was a shy, amiable creature, tall and thin, bald-headed, grey and sandy, but with kind eyes of a vague blueness. He talked in a hurried, jerky manner, seeming never to finish a sentence: indeed, seeming to move so rapidly from one idea to another that his thought was never completed in his own mind. But, instinctively and at once, Vivien felt at home with him. In the great house the librarian at least should be a friend for her.

'I hope you *will* use the library, miss. Plenty of books. I am sorry I startled you. Mrs. Macnamara never had a book down all the time she was here—only came prying with her friend Mrs. Mapleton. But look, miss—very simple when you see how it's done.'

He had turned on some more lights, and the long room had opened up: its far end still lost in the shadows. Now, with a chuckling pride, he moved a bolt in the bookshelf; and, pushing, caused a block of books of the size of a door to open backwards. Through the opening thus made, one saw a small book-lined room, an open door, and the foot of a narrow staircase.

'There, miss, that's how I come in and go out. What sort of book would you like? Hope you'll be able to choose one you like. That leads to my own rooms you know. We have eighteen thousand volumes altogether.'

Vivien was charmed with this secret entry—worthy of a ghost's path through the solid shelves. When closed again, its position could be detected by no one: the books that masked it were not dummies, but real books that one could take from the shelves —a delightful contrivance.

'Fiction, miss? Oh yes. Two thousand volumes . . . *David Copperfield?* Certainly. Original edition—very interesting with the green covers. You've heard of the old green covers? His lordship—that's his lordship's grandfather you know—great student—he would have the original editions of everything. Added to the interest, he always said.'

Suddenly, as Mr. Frensham turned the clicking switches, the other end of the room sprang from the darkness into full light, and Vivien stood spellbound, staring, pointing.

There was a fireplace similar to the other, and above it another immense picture, a life-sized portrait of another soldier —a soldier of the present day. Drawing a deep breath of wonder, Vivien stood and pointed at the picture. It was finely painted: a solid piece of work by Heppell, the famous modern,

that boldly challenged comparison with the work of the dead master facing it at the other end of the room, and did not suffer by the comparison. Most princely this young man looked in the preposterously splendid uniform—the glittering cuirass, rich tunic, gold and silver, with the helmet held in a gauntleted hand, and the great plume drooping. Fair and gracious, his blue eyes seeming to look down in a grave scrutiny, her dream-prince had sprung from the darkness, and now lifelike yet dreamlike and wonderful, stood before her.

'His lordship,' said Mr. Frensham proudly. 'Her ladyship's grandson. Uniform of Household Cavalry. Painted by Heppell to her ladyship's order. Hung here because this is his lordship's favourite room. The room he used as a boy.'

'But why is he called Lord Helensburgh? Why isn't he Lord Colwyn?'

'He *is* Lord Colwyn,' said Mr. Frensham, looking at the picture with pride and affection. 'But as Earl of Helensburgh of course he has to use the title of the higher rank. His father was created an earl you know. Compliment from the sovereign. He'll be called the Duke of Morecambe before long. Very old, his grace! Very infirm and shaky. Never leaves Culverlands now.'

To-night she did not open the masterpiece of the late Mr. Dickens. Her own thoughts were so filled with fantastic marvels that the highest imaginative fiction must have seemed pallidly commonplace. Was it not all marvellous? Yesterday, Mrs. Kearsley's: to-day, this! With a sigh of luxurious content, she stretched herself in the soft warmth of the vast bed and lay open-eyed, thinking of the incredible change in her fortunes. Through the solid mahogany doors not a sound of the great house reached her. Yet it lay like a town full of life all about her. But this was the silence of palaces: the lulling charm of silence that only wealth can buy without seeking solitude and empty places. In here, the gentle pulse of the clock, the murmuring tongues of flame were strangely distinct; and cinders as they fell on the porcelain tiles made a noisy, cheerful clink. The good firelight showed her in soft warm tones the splendour in the midst of which she lay, flickering pleasantly on rosewood panels and ormolu brackets, and giving to the curtains a redly luminous surface between the shadows of the deep folds.

But the crowning wonder, the dreamlike climax to which the long day had surely and secretly been leading, was the picture. She smiled as she thought of it, wrapping herself in the dream-nonsense of the old school days. She had small thought of him

now as a real man—possibly a very commonplace, and certainly a somewhat dissipated, young nobleman of the present day, whom in due course she would now meet. She did not really want to see him, to hear his voice. She almost wished he would keep away, and not shatter the dream by obtruding a dull reality. It was in his dream-capacity alone that his company could be desirable. And to-night he was in truth the fairy prince of the sweet old school-nonsense.

The perilous wanderings of the poor shivering goose-girl were over: she was safe at last. No evil powers dared assail her now. Cold, Famine, Fear were creeping baffled from the castle walls: the murmuring flames whispered a spell that could ward off all towering-cloaked figures: henceforth no dark and wickedly scheming knight could molest or threaten—secure at last, she was—yes—now, dropping off to sleep in the castle of the fair-haired, blue-eyed, sweetly-smiling fairy prince.

XXI

BEHIND the great house the ground sloped upward to the down country. The rising parklands were bordered by beech woods: the fringe of the old forest of the Roman occupation. Here, in the wide bridle path, could still be traced the ancient road built and used by the Romans: used later by the pious pilgrims and honest merchants of Chaucer's days, used now by Lady Colwyn's farmers riding from Hawkridge over the hill to the little market town of Tellhurst. Beyond the woods, one came out into a landscape that seemed bleak and desolate when contrasted with the fertile plain. Here and there, a few solidly built, but uninteresting cottages; solitary farm-houses; sandy ridges, firs and rabbit warrens; and then, climbing, one reached the short grass of the chalk ridge, sheep and wooden huts, and at last the bare down. Turning here, one had a noble view of the domain of Lady Colwyn. In the clear winter days, when the east wind swept along the ridge, one could see the St. Keverne territory laid out in a vast, faintly tinted map: woods and fields in delicate browns and greys; a dozen miles away, the bluish smoke-coloured marshes and sandy flats near the sea; and, of a white smoke-colour, the sea itself.

St. Keverne was the family name. And this Hawkridge from the ancient forest to the sea had been given by the Angevin King Henry to his own son, the first St. Keverne. Thus the founder of the family had been of royal blood—a legitimate prince, as the family had ever held, only deprived of his full style and title for high reasons of state. It was perhaps all mythical nonsense about the marriage of the king, as a hot-headed boy, to the fair young abbess in Normandy: a pretty tale, and no more, of the hunting party and the princely hunter lost to court and king for a month and more in the wild woodlands; of virtue that would not yield, of lust that would not be baulked; of the midnight wedding in the torchlit chapel of the abbey. But in the archives of this noble house the legend was of course to be maintained as of sacred truth. There were books—shelves full of the fabulous lore—in the Hawkridge brary. Every twenty years or so some fiftieth busybody

cousin, hanging on to the grand race, anxious to please the head of the house and prove to the world his relationship, wrote a book about it; and all the books were here, with all their fulsome dedications. Here, too, were all the books that could and should support the legend—chronicles, records, early French and early English, histories of Normandy, its churches, abbeys, monasteries, and convents, etc.; and this much at least seemed true: There had been an Abbey of St. Keverne; and a royal favourite, taking his name therefrom, had been given a tract of good English land by the southern sea; and had built his castle on the ridge to bridle the marshes and sandy flats, and to make his hawklike swoop on sea-robbers, rebellious peasants, or any one else who tempted him to swoop.

Vivien, sitting on the floor in the library, heard it all from Mr. Frensham the librarian. He brought down from the shelves so many volumes, and so piled a big table and the neighbouring chairs, that he drove her to the floor to make room for them; and as he turned the pages with practised hand, seeking and finding choice and convincing passages, he seemed to take as keen a pride in the dignity of the family as though he himself had been a member of the family.

'You may depend upon it, miss, that's just how it happened. See here—here it is—old Jean de Louviers himself says it. "Mais le prince la désirait si effrénément"—You understand French, miss?—"qu'il jura de la posséder quand même"—It's old French—all the old spelling!—"et il dit qu'il ne dormirait pas cette nuit sans l'avoir pour son épouse." There! Épouse! *Son épouse!* I'll translate it—"And none should say him nay. Not all the holy church and not the pope and not the devil."' . . .

Vivien, though deeply interested, was shy of the old French chroniclers: one never quite knew what they might say next. But she encouraged Mr. Frensham to unroll the legend in his own words, and, while she listened eagerly, she glanced up at the painted face above her; and the painted eyes and the painted lips seemed to smile with careless good nature. 'It is all true,' he seemed to be saying. 'If I had my rights I should not be riding in the bodyguard. The bodyguard would be riding about *me*!'

'That's why they're all called Henry—every son of the house named Henry. Never dropt the name. It's always been known to the sovereign. The royal family always understood. Astonishing compliments the sovereign has always paid them—because it was known to the sovereign. Treated them on a different footing to any other family—like cousins, miss.

You must get her ladyship to show you letters she has received —does still receive—from Windsor. All in her own hand—her ladyship has shown them to me—asking for news of her ladyship, and how Helensburgh was getting on with his lessons—Astonishing compliment from the sovereign; but she *knows*, never forgets it—writes as though to a cousin by birth.'

'But Lady Colwyn,' said Vivien smiling, 'would be only a cousin by marriage. She was not born a St. Keverne.'

'Oh yes she was, miss—a true St. Keverne—cousin to the old lord.'

But if the early history of the family was mythical and shadowy, the comparatively recent history of the family was so baffling and intricate that it seemed wellnigh impossible to master it. Vivien wished to unravel the mystery, and Mr. Frensham urged her in strong terms to address herself to a particular section of the library and carefully study some of the huge historical peerages in which the section was very rich. From such a task she recoiled. Early associations, a painful memory of parental researches had rendered the *Peerage* to her the most distasteful of books of reference—a volume into which she did not care even to dip. If Mr. Frensham would explain, it would be kind of him to do so. Why in the name of reason had every one a different rank and title? How could the grandson of a baroness be an earl at present, and about to be a duke?

The explanation was long. Mr. Frensham picked up the thread at successive interviews. The pleasure he obviously derived from displaying these splendours and the discursive method he employed ran into many half hours and extended over days.

In the reign of George the Third, Lord St. Keverne, twenty-sixth baron, had married the heiress of the noble and immensely wealthy house of Morecambe. His son had become in due course Earl of Morecambe. Why? Because the Morecambe dignities descended in the female line. This Earl of Morecambe—who was also Lord St. Keverne of course—was created Marquis of Morecambe; and then, under George the Fourth, was created Duke of Morecambe. Why? Well—because of his vast wealth. Now the second son of this first duke was Lord Henry Colwyn-St. Keverne. At this point, one should consider that the family had divided into two lines, and should firmly keep one's attention to the younger branch; resisting any inclination to wonder about the elder son, the heir to the dukedom. Consider him as safe and sound in his northern palace—Culverlands, the principal ducal seat—the ancestral

home of the Morecambes. But this must be borne in mind. By a family arrangement the house and lands of Hawkridge were now settled on this younger son. Well then, Lord Henry was a politician, and under William the Fourth had been created Baron Colwyn of Hawkridge. When accepting a peerage from Lord Melbourne he could not of course be Lord St. Keverne, because that title still belonged to the elder branch. This first Lord Colwyn had married another heiress, so that wealth still rolled into the family. Then came his son, the second Lord Colwyn and husband of the grim old lady who now reigned at Hawkridge. Their son and only child had been Mr. Henry St. Keverne the famous politician—a genius, said Mr. Frensham; but a genius who could not get on comfortably with his parents. He was a Radical, and his dreadful political opinions had been the first cause of the sorrow and estrangement. His meteoric success had, it seemed, but widened the breach. 'A second Pitt,' said Mr. Frensham. 'But of course you have read of his career, miss.—In the cabinet at twenty-five. Strongest man in the House, all agreed. Astonishing compliments paid to him.' Yet in his brilliancy and power there had been an element of unrest, and his own party feared him and felt intense relief when he was gloriously kicked upstairs by his revered chief. He too had married an heiress—more and still more wealth rolling into the family!—and he took his title of Helensburgh from his wife's property. 'Very unusual compliment, *that*,' said Mr. Frensham, 'both son and father with seats in the Lords—and in two years, when the party went out, the son advanced to the dignity of an earldom. Astonishing compliment, that.' Lady Helensburgh had died young and the Radical earl—never truly reconciled to his parents—had died before he was forty, leaving an orphan child: the young Lord Helensburgh.

And now, at last returning to the elder branch, one learns that the elder branch has withered down to nothing. The present duke alone remains—an old, old man wheeled in a bath-chair along the great terraces at Culverlands, looking down to the Atlantic Ocean, smiling when the waves dance in the sunlight, shivering beneath his furs when the soft west wind fans his fleshless cheek, carried back to his warm rooms to hold his fleshless hands to the fire in which his own Morecambe coals are burning, and feebly smiling when the flames leap, and feebly moaning when the flames sink down. 'Very infirm, his grace, now, from all accounts.' Not long, therefore, to wait before all come to my lord and he shall be fifth duke and marquis and fourteenth Earl of Morecambe and thirty-first Baron St. Keverne, as well as second Earl and Baron Helensburgh and third Baron

Colwyn of Hawkridge; owner of lands in the three kingdoms and the principality of Wales, rivers, lakes, arms of the sea, the east coast town of Barford, the west coast town of Mallingby, mines, railways, wharfs and warehouses—(Mr. Frensham, scheduling the property, brought forth engravings, maps, and parliamentary blue books)—innumerable mansions: Culverlands itself; the scarcely less splendid seat of Cleckheaton; Cinderford; the Irish castle; the Scotch castle; Morecambe House in London—that gloomy shuttered barracks in the Square, by the spiked gates of which Vivien and Clara had often walked; with Frensham House, the midland property, etc.

In the end Vivien grasped it. She was glad to know the family history. At once the knowledge seemed to throw light upon the character of this wonderful old lady. As a humble student of the late Mr. Darwin, she seemed to understand now—almost everything. Lady Colwyn was the natural product of all that dim past. She was really, when one came to think of it, exactly what one might have expected the long line of fierce feudal lords to make her. Like them, she was proud and stern and unyielding—a true link with the iron chain that stretched behind her. Naturally, she must cling to the past wherein lay the source of all her pride and power. Naturally, she must hate progress, and all advance that changed the old world from which her splendour had sprung. What could progress do for her but insidiously abate her dignity, lessen her weight in the world's scale? Of course she must be old-fashioned, clinging to the habit and the thought of a bygone age.

She was indeed amazingly old-fashioned, with little tricks of speech and manner that belonged to nothing nearer than the stately eighteenth century, permitting herself, too, those sudden and most startling coarse expressions that the greatest ladies commonly used a hundred years ago. She was old-fashioned in thought, narrowing down the world to its old meagre limits, refusing to be drawn from the old thought-area, holding to the old thought-paths with a persistence that had in it something at once doggedly grand and childishly simple.

She exhibited this simple side of her character in a curious way when taking Vivien with her for one of the daily drives. She used an open carriage with low doors and seats for four people, and sometimes Mrs. Mapleton was of the party, but on this afternoon the waiting-woman was not in attendance.

'Are your horses fresh?' said Lady Colwyn to the coachman. 'Good. We will go for a long drive to-day.'

Then she gave her directions—To Tellhurst; on by the windmill; and then down to Parracote—and away they went

swiftly and smoothly across the park, through the open gates, through the bowing village, and away by the hill road to the bowing and cringing little market town. Vivien, asking questions—turning from side to side—turning round to look back at chubby, curtseying children, carters with horses made unmanageable by the passing carriage, a black sow with a squeaking, terrified litter, at everything—enjoyed herself immensely. But Lady Colwyn was silent, not troubling to answer questions, only now and then letting drop some pieces of information.

'That lady is Mrs. Roberts, the wife of the vicar. Sometimes I take her for a drive. She is fond of driving. . . . The fat man who stood with his hat in his hand is the mayor of Tellhurst. A very respectable person. He is a saddler by trade. . . . That is a very old house. I was advised to pull it down, but I would not do so. . . . Yes, it looks very well. That was the reason why I preserved it.'

In a sheltered hollow where roads met, and where there was a schoolhouse, a wooden bridge, and a water-splash, she bade the footman tell the coachman to halt.

'Breathe your horses here. How far have we been now?'

'Not above a dozen miles, my lady,' said the coachman.

From the schoolhouse came the sound of a teacher's voice, and then a noisy chorus from the children. Lady Colwyn sat for a little while, gravely listening to the questioning voice and the responding chorus, then issued further directions, and away rolled the carriage again.

The sun set, and the sky had a dusty redness that presaged frost; they drove across a grey common into black woods; lights showed pleasantly through blinds in cottage windows; the stars came out timidly and then shone boldly; it was dark long before they reached Hawkridge village, but electric lamps were blazing at the park gates, at the stable entrance, at the stone screen, and a dazzling flood of light poured from the great hall, where the servants were waiting with widely opened doors as the smoking horses came clattering under the great porch.

'It has been lovely,' said Vivien, 'but I do hope you are not tired.'

Lady Colwyn ignored the inquiry.

'It may interest you to know, Miss Shelton, that in our excursion we have never left my land.'

Vivien smiled as she understood. No doubt all the directions had been carefully framed to show the extent of the little kingdom, driving perhaps lengthways down the estate and back

again, or taking it in a cunning zigzag, being very careful never to stray over the frontier into the territory of some petty neighbouring prince. Here was an atavistic trait indeed: the simple old savage striking terror into the heart of the guest—the guileless chief mustering his braves in long lines to show them as a vast army.

Every morning throughout the year Dr. James paid a visit to his august patient. He did not frequently see her: his duty was accomplished when, in the daily interview with Mrs. Mapleton, he had heard that all was well. He did not approach by the grand entrance hall, but drove his gig into the Tudor courtyard behind the orangery and the disused kitchens. This was now the business side of the great house: a shadowy, tranquil place of purple brickwork, weather-worn stone, and latticed glass—like a college or an inn of court—free from the noise of servants or the magnificence of guests. Here, beneath the battlemented walls, was a cloister, with brick piers and groined roofs, stone-flagged and white-washed, into which opened low doors that seemed to have sunk beneath the weight of the heavy Tudor architraves. By the sides of the doors were chain bell-handles and little brass plates with names engraved on them—Mr. Wright, Mr. Richards, etc., house steward, clerks, and so forth. Here, in low ceilinged rooms, oak-panelled parlours, and partitioned halls, was transacted the business of the house and much of the business of the estate. The estate agent had rooms here in which he could be found on two days in the week, and hither came the solicitor and his clerks from the office in the village street, with leases, licences, and way-leaves to be passed on from hand to hand until in time they reached their lofty goal, and received the firm unwavering signature of her ladyship.

Through the echoing passages, by Mr. Wright's room and Mr. Richards's room, Dr. James, producing a terrible noise upon the stone flags, used every morning to come stamping to the large and pleasant room where Mrs. Mapleton would presently bring down her report. Here were chintz-covered chairs, old prints upon the walls, blue china in black corner-cupboards, and a low mullioned window through which one could peep across a little formal garden at the end of the orangery—altogether a pleasant, suitable apartment for the reception of a doctor, a solicitor, or any other respectable educated person of similar social status. And here, one morning, Miss Shelton was summoned at the request of Dr. James.

'Oh yes I did really want to see you—to see you for myself, don't you know,' and he laughed in a friendly humorous fashion.

'I have heard such a lot about you, Miss Shelton—from my nephew—that I did really want to make your acquaintance.'

He was a white-haired, fresh-coloured old fellow of sixty-five or so, with a most friendly, open manner.

Vivien hastened to express her very sincere gratitude both to Dr. James and to his kind nephew, Dr. Quinlan, for their goodness to her, but Dr. James laughed away this idea of their goodness.

'I am sure you do us credit, Miss Shelton. A feather in all our caps—puts me up a peg or two in my lady's opinion. The gratitude—all ours of course. I am sure I hope you'll be happy here.'

'I know I shall— That is, if only Lady Colwyn gets to like me—a little.'

'Oh ah! Lady Colwyn!' and Dr. James screwed up his eyes. 'Lady Colwyn is—ah—a very great lady—*not* demonstrative, as you have observed no doubt. A long life, Miss Shelton—doubtless much sorrow—disappointment—wealth and rank can't save one from that—sternly faced and lived down.'

As he spoke of the great lady he became very serious. It was the wise subject speaking of the prince, trying to comprehend, not venturing to judge.

'Doubtless, many tender feelings—all expansive tendencies—must become atrophied from disuse in such a life. Hence, very little emotion outwardly visible—no rapid likes or dislikes of persons or things to be looked for'; and he opened his hands with a deprecating gesture.

'But I am sure she *ought* to like you, Miss Shelton,' and he smiled again. 'And if she doesn't say so—Well, I wouldn't worry about it if I were you,' and he laughed merrily. 'You don't as a rule experience difficulty in making people like you, do you? Good morning, Miss Shelton. I won't ask you after your health because you are my nephew's patient. Must beware of jealousy—professional jealousy I mean. Good morning.'

Rather lamblike, Dr. James, with his open-air voice, and pleasant countrified laugh, that did not wait for the semblance of a joke to set it going.

Another frequent morning visitor was Mrs. Roberts, the vicar's wife. She came sometimes to the big porch, but more often made a modest entry by Dr. James's route, and she always asked at once to see Mrs. Mapleton. She and Mrs. Mapleton were allies, and the vicar's lady was unwearied in her praise of that good, kind creature, the powerful and dreaded favourite of her patroness.

'She *has* passed a good night?' Mrs. Roberts used to say. 'None the worse for this treacherous weather? Capital! That's all I came for—just to inquire. And *you* take care of yourself too, Mrs. Mapleton. Remember, good people are scarce. We don't want *you* laid up—her right hand gone in the depth of the winter,' etc.

'And Mrs. Mapleton—as to saying whether I called, I leave myself in your hands—your own discretion is the best guide. Don't obtrude me on her notice, but if the opportunity comes naturally, why then, say I made inquiries. And if I am wanted for the drive, you know you can rely on me.'

It was a very real pleasure in the uneventful life of Mrs. Roberts to drive and be seen driving with the great lady—to be seen, once or twice or even three times a week, seated by the side of Lady Colwyn, talking to Lady Colwyn (even if she obtained no answers to the talk) as the carriage rolled swiftly down the bowing village street.

'Mrs. Roberts is always very attentive,' Lady Colwyn used to say when Mapleton thought proper to mention the early inquiries.

But now Mrs. Roberts had other matters for inquiry.

'Tell me, Mrs. Mapleton, have I to congratulate you on a real acquisition?'

'You have not,' and Mapleton frowned. 'Very much the reverse in my opinion. We 'ave been deceived in her, Mrs. Roberts—'

'Oh how annoying—'

'If you ask me, the whole thing was a put-up job by old James and that nephew of his. We were just jumped into it; and I for one regret I ever countenanced it.'

Mrs. Mapleton was swelling with resentment against the intruder who had refused her overtures for alliance: was growing more sore each day from encountering the wicked pride that could not suffer the patronage of an underling, more venomously determined sooner or later to crush this impudent spirit—so strangely unlike the spirit of Mrs. Roberts that it would not entertain the idea of being the favourite's favourite; and she now readily poured out a little of her reservoir of spite.

'I've to blame meself for encouraging of it—for giving her the helping hand when I ought to have put me foot down. But I'm bitterly deceived.'

'She won't do?'

'She won't. Do you know what she was? Just a shop-girl—out of a Sloane Street shop. And what the most of these London

shop-girls are if you give 'em their proper name—Well, I won't soil my tongue in your presence. But if you knew London as well as I do, you'd know it's gospel truth. She come here straight out of the shop, and—will you believe me?—she's so chokeful of impidence that she just speaks to her ladyship as though they was simply equals.'

'Oh no?' Mrs. Roberts turned up her eyes in horror.

'What do you think of this as an example of sauce? I heard it with my own ears. After a long drive the other day, she thanks my lady, before everybody in the hall, for all the world like a guest here on a visit. "It 'as been delightful, but I hope you haven't been and tired yourself on my account!" As though, if you please, my lady had been a-driving for *her*!'

'Oh no? Oh no?'

'It's the truth I'm telling you,' and Mrs. Mapleton laughed scornfully.

'But surely her ladyship— The very last person in the world to brook it—'

'Her ladyship gave her one of her looks. I hope and believe her ladyship is just lying back for to drop on her—giving her the rope for to hang herself and then "Good morning Miss Shelton,"' and Mapleton flicked her fingers as though flicking away a fly. 'But if not. Well—we'll just see. There's a many ways of choking a dog—'

'You have ridded her of one great danger, Mrs. Mapleton, and it seems to me you will have to rid her of this.'

Mrs. Roberts was here referring to the horrible fall of the last of the long line of ladies-in-waiting. Mrs. MacNamara and Mapleton had been bosom friends at first. But it often began thus in a friendly alliance. So it had been with most of the long line—Miss Gordon, Mrs. Richardson, Miss Lane, etc.—yet sooner or later their hour had come, and the favourite destroyed them. Poor Mrs. MacNamara loved the priceless port from the colossal cellars, and as her end approached Mapleton plied the doomed wretch to her undoing; then exposed her to my lady: opened a door or threw back a curtain dramatically, and displayed her 'dead to the world.' This was the sort of work the dreaded favourite loved—to sap and mine, then cry 'stand clear' and see the lightning flash and hear the thunderous roar of irremediable ruin. 'That'—she would say to the servants—'*That* is what happen to them as cross my path!' And the vast household cursed her beneath its breath, covertly shook its fist at her, but trembled in almost superstitious dread: so that hulking footmen quaked in their warm beds, or groaned in nightmare,

dreaming that the Mapleton train was laid, that the Mapleton match had flashed, that they were being blown through the heavy blankets thousands of feet into the air.

It certainly seemed that Miss Shelton one morning in the very early days of her new employment, under the blind impulse of a moment, ran perilously near the end of that impalpable rope. Mrs. Mapleton was not present to be pleasantly thrilled by the cold air of disaster that seemed to creep through the flower-perfumed, carefully-warmed atmosphere of the spacious room.

It was Saturday, and newspapers—neatly folded and stitched with green silk by the groom of the chambers—were ranged upon a table. But of all the papers, the little local paper was that from which Miss Shelton was instructed first to read. It was characteristic of her ladyship that she always desired to hear the recorded news of her own little kingdom before turning to the wider zone of public affairs, foreign intelligence, etc.

'Here it is,' said Vivien, finding her place. '"Local and District news. Hawkridge,"' and she began to read the paragraphs under this heading. '"The Earl of Helensburgh has returned to London from Leicester from which centre he has been recently hunting with the Quorn Hounds."' This was of course copied from a London paper. '"What might, but for the presence of mind of a bystander, have proved an alarming accident to the horse and cart of Mr. Murrell,"' etc. This paragraph was the work of the local reporter; and the next paragraph, recording a bazaar and sale of work at Tellhurst, was also from his pen.

'"Thanks to the kindness of Mr. Ferguson, the room was most tastefully decorated with exquisite pot plants and hothouse blooms. We cannot be too grateful to the munificence of those who like Mr. Ferguson has thus done are willing to throw open the stores of great mansions—"'

'Stop,' cried Lady Colwyn. 'Go to the desk and write.'

This, it appeared, was an old offence of the local reporter now come to a head. To the miserable scribe Mr. Ferguson himself was so great that he could not see the greatness behind him. He had done it again and again: 'Thanks are also due to Mr. Ferguson for the handsome manner in which he has sent fruit and flowers to the Tellhurst Hospital in compliance with Lady Colwyn's gracious instructions.' But now, in sycophantic praise of the servant, he had omitted the mistress altogether.

'Take up your pen.'

Lady Colwyn's dark eyebrows met in a terrible frown: there was a flush of anger on her face; her mouth was working, and her hand shook. She was as angry almost as Mrs. Wardrop used to be when the stupid compositors set up skirts for shirts.

'To the Editor of the *Tellhurst District Courier*' she dictated and Vivien began to write. 'Lady Colwyn is astonished at the impertinence of the editor's journal in to-day's number. . . . Well, have you done?'

'Not quite,' and Vivien, with her head bowed low over the paper, wrote slowly and heavily, staring at the dreadful words with a growing horror. Plainly, Lady Colwyn was not really clever at this sort of composition: the manner was as distressing as the matter.

'Lady Colwyn must request the editor when he or his subordinates venture to insert news about her,' etc. It really was a distressing letter.

It was written very slowly, then read aloud, and Lady Colwyn, quite satisfied with the work, smiled grimly. But, on the point of fastening the envelope, Vivien turned in her chair.

'Lady Colwyn— Don't send it. Please don't send it.'

'Not send it? Why?'

'I feel you oughtn't,' Vivien faltered. 'It somehow seems unworthy—I mean, beneath your dignity to take any notice.'

Lady Colwyn's frown was terrible: the dark light that came from beneath these bent brows was as awe-inspiring almost as papa's gloomy stare of disapproval.

'Take the wax and seal it,' said Lady Colwyn. 'Stamp it. Put it down there. Now go.'

Vivien retired in perturbation to brood over her boldness and its possible consequences. Had she been rude and ill-mannered in daring to express her opinion to one so old and self-reliant? It was a painful thought. But no, while she ate her bread she must try to serve her staunchly and loyally. It would have been cowardly and treacherous to watch the irrevocable letter going forth to injure her employer without uttering a protest. It would have been a meanness, not a courtesy, to hold oneself in the security of silence. She was glad that she had found the courage to speak, no matter what the consequences might be.

But there were no consequences apparently: Lady Colwyn, when Miss Shelton came on duty again, did not make any reference to this episode.

She had been over a month at Hawkridge when, on a Saturday afternoon, her London physician paid her the first of his first promised visits. Dr. Quinlan had been ushered into that pleasant and useful room with the old prints and blue china. He was standing by the window when she came to him, and he noted the sounds of her firm, light footsteps, and the strong turn of the handle as she opened the door. Her health had improved enormously. She had said so in her letters; and his ear made him sure of it before she appeared, to please his eyes with the other good signs—better carriage of the head, increased colour, quicker gestures, and best of all, more flesh. The good food, the good warmth, the good rest had done their work rapidly. His face flushed, and he smiled in the pleasure that her improved appearance gave to him.

Dr. Quinlan, when he had asked a very few professional questions, seemed to have very little to say, and it was Vivien who suggested that they should go for a walk through the gardens. When she returned in her hat and jacket, she showed him some of the splendours of her new surroundings —the great hall, the chapel, and the rooms that held the Rubens and the Vandykes. He wore a most solemnly professional aspect as, following her, he glanced at the pictures and the statues and the painted ceilings. There seemed to be an air of constraint about him: as though the great house itself oppressed him. Although he had been born within the shadow of its greatness, this was the first time that he had entered its heavy doors. He seemed to draw a breath of relief when the cold wind met them on the threshold. They only looked at the stately Italian garden. He seemed to edge away from the stone-walled terraces as though conscious that from somewhere behind the endless windows of the stately Italian front, the eyes of the great lady were coldly looking down upon them; and he seemed to seek instinctively the mellow red walls and the yew hedges, sunk lawns and small enclosures of the older and less formal gardens that led to the orangery and the outer court.

Vivien felt a sense of constraint, arising not from vague, but from specific causes. Her bill! He had never rendered any account. It was painful to let this matter slide altogether, more painful still to 'tackle' him and insist upon paying. The greater includes the less. He had done so much for her in her trouble that there would be something horrible in appearing

to say: 'Now with those pounds and shillings I pay you, and cease to be in your debt.'

Nevertheless she made allusion—as lightly as she could—to this, the lesser, indebtedness; but immediately he began to blush and to stammer as on that other occasion.

'Accounts—as a rule half-yearly—but please don't give it a thought—really not worth speaking of.'

While he stammered incoherently, he looked not at her, but straight in front of him—down a vista between yew hedges at the stretching park, the stone bridge, and the leafless avenue—and he blushed hotly. And Vivien, blushing also, determined to let the bill slide and never tackle. It would be a mean, base pride that should wound this good young man merely to rid oneself of an uncomfortable sensation.

'May I—er—come and see you again?' said Dr. Quinlan. 'Not as a patient—you don't need a doctor—but—er—merely as a friend—when I happen to come down here?'

'Oh do,' said Vivien, 'whenever you can. You can't guess how lonely I feel sometimes.' Then remorse struck her for those foolish words. 'I don't mean that. It must have sounded hatefully ungrateful,' and she hastened to assure him that she was fully sensible of her great good fortune, and most happy and contented as well as unceasingly grateful to him.

He was delighted that he might come again.

It was during the evening after Dr. Quinlan's visit that she made a totally unexpected discovery.

Lady Colwyn was busy. She was about to attack a new task with her untiring knitting-needles: a necktie in coloured silks for her grandson. Very slowly, but neatly and methodically, refusing all assistance, she was arranging her materials: putting the variously tinted threads in long envelopes upon the table at her elbow. Presently she told Vivien to bring her more envelopes from the bureau: and, searching one of the drawers for the envelopes of the correct shape, Vivien came upon it—that dictated letter to the local editor, sealed and stamped and made ready for the post over three weeks ago.

Vivien, delighted, pulled it from its hiding-place, and turned to her employer with a happy smile.

'Then you didn't send it after all! I am so glad. I *am* so glad you didn't send it.'

'I did not send that letter,' said Lady Colwyn very coldly and very sternly. 'I do not know why you should be glad or sorry.'

XXII

MY lord was coming to Hawkridge. Throughout February there had been talk of it; and now, in these last days of the rainy, dismal month, his speedy arrival was definitely announced. My lord was coming to discuss matters with my lady; my lord would bring horses, and hunt; my lord would stay at least a week.

'Miss Shelton,' said her ladyship, 'did I tell you that Helensburgh is coming?'

Lady Colwyn had told Miss Shelton more than once, and Miss Shelton had been observing and reflecting. Here was something very certain: however far had spread that emotional atrophy spoken of by old Dr. James, it had not extended to those nerve centres in which lay stored Lady Colwyn's thoughts of her grandson. She might be cold and hard as granite to all the world, but a lamp of soft flame had been kept burning for this young man. If she could be cruel and crushingly repressive to poor girls hired to write her letters, slowly but surely making them understand that their desire to please and yearning for responsive regard were as foolishly conceived as the cravings of a half-witted bird that had built its nest in some old ivy-clad tower, and thought the tower ought to be fond of it for thus nesting,—she, nevertheless, loved her grandson. There could be no doubt of that. Her voice had a subtle change as she spoke of him: and especially when she spoke of him once or twice as her 'boy.' Then the tenderness pierced through the unchanged manner very plainly.

'I think they will lose my boy unless they are careful.' She had brought out his letter and was once more re-reading it. 'Doubtless regimental rules are necessary, but it cannot be wise to push them too far. There must be exceptions. It is hardly to be supposed that my boy can give the corps so much time as his comrades—as people who are very differently situated.'

'I should think not indeed,' said Mrs. Mapleton. 'They ought to consider the honour of having his name on their books at all.'

'Yes,' said Lady Colwyn thoughtfully, 'I think I will write a

few lines to the Commander-in-Chief—giving him a hint of the danger they run of losing my boy altogether. Yes. I think I will do that. But not now. Later, Miss Shelton.'

Then, next day: 'Miss Shelton, Helensburgh is coming to-morrow. I hope we may have no frost to interfere with his sport. In what quarter is the wind? . . . West! Ah that is as it should be.' And turning to Mrs. Mapleton: 'How long is it since his lordship was here? A long time. Quite early in the autumn, wasn't it?'

'Longer ago than that,' said the privileged favourite. 'Best part of a year, my lady. We haven't seen his lordship since that time when there was the ball at Hacketts and Mrs. Arncliffe was staying there.'

Lady Colwyn frowned and looked into the fire.

Then they knew about that wicked woman! The scandal was so gross that it had penetrated even this magnificent seclusion. But how odious of Mrs. Mapleton thus to remind her mistress—to suggest the thought that the shameless guest at another house, and not his lonely grandmother, had in truth drawn my lord to the neighbourhood!

First came his horses, a string of them—seen by Vivien—two by two, grooms riding and leading, two, four, six of them: delicate, snorting, prancing creatures, so absurdly wrapped up, with their eyes peeping through goggling circles of the braided head coverings, that they looked like horses dressed in sham armour—horses wearing pantaloon's spectacles. For a week's hunting—when the great stables were already full of noble pawing steeds! Oh monstrous! Then came one of Lady Colwyn's dark-coloured omnibuses: two men-servants inside, and vast piles of luggage—solid leather cases, square and oblong: luggage, it seemed, sufficient for many families for many months. Then, slowly returning, the empty brougham. My lord had missed the train: was to travel by a later train. Then, at last, long after dark, with a single body-servant and a few more leather cases, the young man came himself.

Vivien dined alone in a room upstairs that she had never seen before, while his lordship dined alone below in the dining-room. Then she went on duty, and in half an hour her dream-prince had been introduced to her; she was sitting in the same room with him; she was listening to his voice.

He stood on the hearthrug, with his hands in his pockets, and talked to Granny—as he called her—about business matters: some Bill which was to be introduced next session, and which concerned the midland property. He had brought

papers with him: printed documents; and the old lady had put them on the table beneath the reading-lamp at her elbow, and was smiling, and seemed gratified by his appearing to wish for her advice.

'They tell me it 's all right,' he said. 'But I 'm so sick of it all that I can't pretend to know if it is really right or wrong. Don't you trouble about it, granny, but just glance through the draft, any time. It 'll seem plain enough to *you*, I daresay,' and he stifled a yawn.

His waistcoat was white, and he had jewelled buttons and pearl studs, and he looked tall and slim and boyish.

'Don't you bother about it, granny—Drop me a line any time and tell me what I ought to do.' Then he began to ask questions—again suppressing the inclination to yawn, and with an obvious effort making conversation. 'How are the gardens getting on, granny? Still got what 's-his-name—Ferguson? By the by, how is Henry Frensham? I haven't seen him yet. I must rout out old Henry Frensham before bedtime. I see Mapleton looks pretty bobbish. How long has Mapleton been with you, granny?'

As he talked, he stared about the room, and he smiled very pleasantly and looked very like his picture downstairs; and every now and then he stared at Vivien. It was a steady stare —gorgonising one from head to foot, she thought—but a careless, unseeing, absent-minded scrutiny under which she suffered. In exactly the same way he stared at the servants when they brought coffee: following them with his eyes as long as they remained in the room. Then he began to fidget.

And all the time she suffered. It was worse, far worse, than she had dreaded. This was the final death-blow to all her dream-fancies. In these ten minutes his princely attributes had slipped from him for ever. His voice was low and not unmusical; outwardly he was as the picture downstairs, as the picture she had carried so long in her mind; but while he stood before the fire, with his long legs a little apart and his hands in his pockets, her prince had tumbled to pieces, had crumbled into fine powder, or had shrivelled up, taken fire from the flames in the grate, and as smoke gone up the wide chimney.

He had been in the room ten minutes; he had yawned twice; and now, already, he wanted to go. He must have a look at the barometer, he explained, perhaps go outside the house to see what sort of a night it was; he had not cared for the appearance of the sky at sunset; but he would be back directly. Scarcely was he across the threshold when Vivien, sitting near the door, heard him emit a horrible, lugubrious yawn, as of a

large dog. Poor vacuous youth, poor clay image into which no divine dream breath has ever entered! Oh splendid fraud, oh bitter deception!

Ere he returned, Lady Colwyn had settled down to her work with the papers: the lamp shade close to her thin nose while she read with a masterful, stern intentness. And now he fidgeted wofully, picking up books and putting them down, lolling in a deep chair and fingering a paper-knife, getting up again and watching the pendulum of a clock on a cabinet. He was like a child who is slowly reaching the sad conclusion that, if he is not to be amused, the sooner he is sent to bed the better.

'I have been playing piquet lately, granny. A lot of people seem coming back to piquet. They say at the Turf—but I mustn't interrupt you.'

Lady Colwyn looked up from the papers.

'You play piquet, Miss Shelton. Miss Shelton will play with you if you like.'

Immediately he was like a contented child who will not hear one word about bed: ringing the bells, laughing, almost clapping his hands with delight. In a minute the servants had set out the card-table, with candles, new unopened packs, and marking blocks. His lordship, pointing, indicated where the table should be placed, so that in the big room they might sit a long way from granny and disturb her as little as possible. Then hurriedly he tore the paper from each pack, and—rapid as lightning—sorted out the low cards. Vivien, with heightened colour, rather excited and not without nervous apprehension, took her seat at the table. It was the thought of the points that caused her uneasiness. She would have to play for money, she feared; but he would understand—he was a gentleman—he would not make her play for much money. He looked at her now in quite a different manner: with a steady, impudent, investigating scrutiny; and he smiled at her—not at vacancy.

'Now then,' he said. 'Stakes! What? We must play for something.'

'Very well,' said Vivien drawing in her breath. 'Not high.'

'Oh bother! I like high stakes.' He really was brutal. 'What shall we say? Something really high—I mean high for you, low for me.'

'What you like,' said Vivien desperately. She was outraged by his brutal insistence, and her pride made her defiant. If the points that he named proved impossible she would fly from the table.

'Very well We'll play for—love. That's a high stake, isn't it?'

Had he said it desiring to see her blush? If so, he met with no success. He had been watching her face, and now he burst out laughing.

'Scored off, young lady? You thought I wanted to rook you. You know you did,' and he laughed so heartily that she found she must laugh also.

Really he was like a schoolboy, now that amusement had been provided for him. The change in his manner was startling in its abruptness. Half an hour ago his eyes rested on her, and wandered away from her, as though she had been one of the many pieces of furniture of the room. Now, without transitional preparation, he talked to her as though they had been lifelong friends, or two children whose childlike, friendly confidence needs no time in which to ripen.

'My deal, isn't it?' and he dealt.

But when he picked up his cards, a black cloud of annoyance passed across his face.

'Oh of course,' he said. 'Just because it's of no importance —you know what I mean. Look here, I've fourteen aces.'

'You mustn't tell me that.'

'Why not?'

'Because it will help me in discarding.'

'Oh,' and he laughed again. 'Discard to your heart's content. I leave you four cards. Come on. Hurry up. I've everything. Repique. Capot,' and he counted his hand: showing her the cards in a flash, and then laying them on the table.

'I say. I had you beat there. What are we playing for?' And he looked at her very hard, with his impudent, laughing, schoolboy stare. Was he again trying to make her blush?'

Then Vivien dealt, and with puckered forehead very slowly considered her hand, and played this and the next hand in a manner that, although it might have been of force sufficient for poor old Mrs. Maitland, was perhaps not quite up to club form. Indeed it was apparent that she had yet much to learn.

'Stop,' said her opponent suddenly. 'I've won. Over a hundred you know! You're beaten into a cocked hat,' and he tore off the scoring sheet and threw it away from the table. 'We'll play something else. This is stale'; and he laughed once more. 'We've played one of the games you *know*. Let's play one you *don't* know. There's a game they are playing a lot at the card clubs. Lots of money changed hands over it. I'll teach it to you. Ancient Celibate. Ever heard of it?'

And he began to deal and explain.

'There. That is the stock. Only one card in the stock at Ancient Celibate. Now sort your hand and discard all pairs.

By a pair, I mean two of a kind—two kings, two fives, two aces. Colour and suit don't count,' and from his own hand he threw out pair after pair.

'Why, this is simply Old Maid.'

'Sold again,' said my lord. 'Of course it is.'

And now Vivien laughed till tears came to her eyes.

'I begin to understand your style of humour,' she said still laughing.

Greening! That was his notion of fun—the old school greening, and the swift memory of the old school-days made her as a child again. Thus, like two children, they played the silly nursery card games and laughed and made merry all the evening. Now and then Lady Colwyn looked up from her papers. The white head turned towards the young people; the dark brows bent above gravely inquiring eyes; but at the sound of my lord's laughter she smiled and went on reading. The half hours slipped by; it was late, past eleven, when her ladyship finished her reading, the card-table broke up, and this, the first evening of laughter that Vivien had experienced in the great house, came to an end.

'I say. I must confide a secret in you.' He said this in a whisper, leaning forward as he shuffled the cards for the last time. 'You are not a tell-tale. Don't protest. I see it.—I'm a judge of character—wonderful chap for my years.'

'What is the secret?'

'Well. It's freezing. If we can't hunt, I really shan't be able to stick it for a week. Do you think granny will mind?'

Next day there was a hard frost, and by an afternoon train my lord returned to London. Lady Colwyn asked him once to stay—for another day at least. At this time of year such weather was abnormal: the frost could not hold. But he explained that to stay now would only cause more friction with his colonel. He had obtained leave to hunt, but as hunting was stopped all over the kingdom, he ought to go back to his regimental duties. The troublesome colonel would expect him. Granny's lip trembled, but the proud spirit forbade her to ask him a second time to stay.

Vivien, calmly reviewing his visit, was horrified. Really, he was nothing but a pampered overgrown schoolboy—certainly not a fool, with perhaps a shrewder insight and quicker apprehension than just at first one might suspect, with a joyful sense of humour of an absolutely primitive or rudimentary order. These were good traits. On the other hand, there was colossal egotism, an unquestioning selfishness, as exhibited in the harsh treatment of granny. Seeking for aught redeeming, for any saving grace or charm, one could but think of this as attractive

—a certain mysterious aura of good fellowship that in a moment he spread about him, an atmosphere of careless ease that he could throw over any chance encounter, making one feel that if one knew him well it would be difficult not to like him, as a pleasant comrade, a good pal. Yet unseen, in the dark background, there lay the record of his known profligacy. One could not forget that. No, the prince was gone for ever. Who could be so blind as to take this wanton dissolute boy for a man and leader of men?

But in sleep her prince returned—sad and splendid—a ghost—no longer alive. Strange! Then, stranger still, the prince and the boy reappeared in the same dream: the live boy mocking the dead prince—a teasing school imp aping the aspect of the prince and mocking the dreamer.

Week after week, the quiet life went on. Yet, in the midst of so much magnificence, melancholy sometimes seized her. As she wandered about the great house, the Spirit of Sudden Sadness lurked and lay waiting for her behind the lofty doors. She was too young to enter this splendid back-water of life, where the sheltered stream moved imperceptibly, where no storm could come to break the stagnant peace. Her duties were too light: some real work to fill the heavy hours would have been most welcome. Every day Lady Colwyn made her comprehend more clearly that little attentions were not required, that efforts towards friendly communion could not be permitted, that she was one of the thousand girls—one of the thousand pieces of indoor and outdoor furniture with which Lady Colwyn could in an hour provide herself, and that she must not hope to be considered as anything else. Instinctively she understood that, from the furniture point of view, she satisfied Lady Colwyn, that she was filling the post of lady-in-waiting adequately, and that she was in no danger of hasty dismissal. But Lady Colwyn would never like her, or show one touch of sympathy. She had ceased to hope for that. She was absolutely alone in this new labyrinth; and sometimes a nostalgic yearning overcame her—making her feel wickedly ungrateful, but making her long for Mrs. Wardrop's shop and all its hardships and perils.

The pride and the pomp crushed one, lowered one's spirits, and weakened one's nervous tone, in spite of the generous fires, the thick curtains, soft bed, and noble food. Above all, the base flattery and grovelling subservience, the sycophancy of the vulgar Mapleton, of Mrs. Roberts, of the poor old Vicar, of Dr. James even, of every one who entered the house, created an atmosphere inimical to mental health, made one live in an intellectual prison,

where reasoned thought lay fettered, gasping, dying for want of fresh air.

On such Sundays as her ladyship drove to the village church, she carried this atmosphere with her and even the sacred service seemed to languish. When those prayers came for kings and princes and all set in authority over us, no one could doubt that the Vicar was thinking of the white-haired old dame in the red-lined pew beneath the painted window. Choir, congregation, even the smallest of the school children, knew what the Vicar meant; and Mrs. Roberts used to look directly at her patron, in a fervour of humble invocation, as though saying: 'Yes indeed I do pray *for* you and *to* you. O Lady Colwyn, continue to shed forth the divine light of your countenance upon this thy servitor. Be merciful and gracious to all these thy poor creatures here prostrated at thy feet.

And the measured, pompful arrogance of Lady Colwyn herself, praying for peace, prosperity, and so forth, addressing her petitions to another unseen great person! Vivien, listening, seemed to hear the words of the thought, not the spoken words:

'Lady Colwyn of Hawkridge presents her compliments to the Most High and certainly thinks it desirable that He should at His leisure give attention to the repeated requests of her tenants and dependents here assembled with her full permission.'

The air of the sacred edifice almost stifled one.

It was curious that Mr. Frensham seemed to read the mind of the lonely visitor to his library. As he ran on in his odd inconsecutive way, flashes of wisdom came from him. If you asked him direct questions he seemed incapable of answering them with any directness. He wandered away from the point, accepting interrogation as a hint, a good start for vague speculation, from which, if you listened and were not in a hurry, something valuably suggestive might at any moment emerge.

Thus, when Vivien came for another of the works of the late Mr. Dickens or Mr. Thackeray, he said 'Yes miss, yes to be sure,' but turned away from the shelves where the novels stood without immediately taking down the volume.

'Delightful thing, a clever story, miss,' said Mr. Frensham, ambling away from the novels. 'Surprising how it carries one out of oneself, doesn't it, miss? Characters all seem alive—to young people especially—every bit as though they *were* alive—friends that you are bound to think of. Wonderful pastime, reading—When the time hangs heavy, no better way of filling it. If ever you want to weigh yourself, miss, there's a weighing-machine in here'; and he opened his secret entrance, and invited her to examine the little room beyond.

'His lordship—the old lord—Helensburgh's grandfather, you know—great student—had one bought,' and he showed her the weighing-chair. 'He used to weigh himself—all the records kept. Said it added to the interest. He found he gained weight on history and always lost weight in research. You can almost trace his reading from the weights in that book.'

Then he showed her the particular table by a window where the old nobleman used to sit at his endless studies, and described the methodic care with which he made extracts, stocking innumerable note-books. He had always been a student, never a writer.

'It filled his life, miss—kept him alive in spite of wretched health. You ought to write your letters here, miss. A library is always a cheerful room—pleasant view from that table. A great pity for a room like this not to be used more. His lordship—I mean Helensburgh'—and he glanced at the picture—'always uses this room. Came in last time he was here and we sat talking till two o'clock. Immensely clever—full of fun—great knowledge of the world—do great things later on, miss.'

Then, rambling about the long room, he drew her attention to the blocks devoted to biography, science, philosophy.

'Yes, what were we saying? Oh yes—reading with a purpose. That's it, miss. That was Lord Colwyn's secret—fills one's life—opens the mind, develops the powers. See, miss, astonishing good books, many of these. Something more in them than the novels. A liberal education in those books, he used to say—and a great privilege to live surrounded by such a library. I've felt it myself often—never stored the mind when young—no opportunity. I have always regretted it. Too late now. While one's young—with plenty of time to spare—that's the chance to enlarge the mind—never lose an opportunity.'

In this manner—through the broken curtain of words the flash of wisdom dimly came. Vivien, thinking it over, understood. It could not be accidental; he must have intended to convey this friendly message: He was sorry to see her moping and disconsolate, but a cure for idle repinings lay within reach. Instead of reading so many novels, she ought to read a few of the solid books. Instead of wasting the empty hours, she ought to fill them with resolute work—the great work, neglected since the far-off Bauermann-impelled spurt, of mind-improvement.

Immediately, with rising spirits, she began to act on this friendly hint, spending much of her time when off duty at the old lord's table: overwhelmed at first by the eager assistance of the librarian, who chuckled, rubbed his hands, and buried the table beneath an embarrassing load of heavy thought-stimulants,

but, after a time, truly reading in the manner of an honest student.

And the friendly companionship of the queer old fellow cheered and sustained her. Among these close-packed shelves there was a fresher atmosphere: among the immortal dead the splendour of the living was less oppressive. Sitting by the window, while the keen March winds buffeted the yews and swept through the formal gardens with a contemptuous fury, one could write one's letters more cheerfully and comfortably than alone in the big bedroom or within sound of the great lady's clicking needles. Mr. Frensham was intensely proud of the great family, puffing out his cheeks and extending his arms as he spoke of its greatness; but somehow he was not sycophantic. Affection as well as pride beamed from his light-coloured eyes when he talked of the young man; and generally he called him 'Helensburgh,' and forgot to say 'his lordship'—an omission that surprised and soothed the ear.

She wrote often to Marian, describing her new life, eagerly demanding news of the old life, and the old friends, who already seemed to have receded to an immensely distant past. There was always sadness in her thoughts of Marian: a yearning pity had blended itself in the web of all her recollections of poor Marian; and sometimes, as she wrote, that dreadful photograph of the moustachioed man with the yachting cap would form upon the thick white note-paper, and she turned almost sick with horror and digust, as when she held it in her hand and sat miserably staring at it in Battersea Park. Of the man she could not write: she could not allude to his existence. But she hoped that her dear Marian was happy. Marian would not now doubt her sympathy and unshaken love.

Marian said she was as happy as ever, and sent her all the shop news. Mrs. Wardrop had forbidden Mr. Pritchard to show his face for one month at least. Miss Inman had told Marian in strictest confidence that she believed Mrs. Wardrop was endeavouring to turn the shop into a limited company, and by this means eventually retire from business. Mrs. Wardrop's brutal visitor had not reappeared. Mrs. Wardrop's angry temper—now traceable to private cares—had not improved. Clara was not so bright and amusing as she used to be. They all missed Vi.

Vivien had written to her father, announcing her altered circumstances; and Colonel Shelton had replied, on club note-paper, with commendable and most unusual promptness.

'I do,' said papa, 'most cordially approve of the wise step my

little girl has now taken. You know that, though I admired your strength of mind, I never was really reconciled to that other arrangement. I am an old man, Vi, unable to take up the new ideas; and I confess that it never seemed a proper employment for my daughter. But, thank goodness, that is all over and done with, and I have nothing now to offer you but sincere congratulations.'

And then papa reminded her of the grandeur of the St. Keverne family. It was a vast privilege to be admitted on terms of theoretical equality to such exalted circles. He knew almost as much about the family as Mr. Frensham. Undoubtedly he had quite recently been toiling at those red books of his.

'If Lord Helensburgh is of your party, pray recall me to him. It is many years since we last met—indeed not since he was quite a lad. Time flies—' and again he spoke of his age. 'This winter has tried me, Vi. Your father is older than he cares to remember. I have been weak and ill this winter. Be happy, my dear girl, and write to me often.'

Yes, she might write to him now on the thick paper with the embossed coronet and the grandly simple address, from the realm of pomp and plenty where no extraneous aid was needed. Poor papa! She folded his letter almost reverentially. She was thinking of the thin black figure that stooped and leaned upon the stick as very slowly it disappeared.

One letter that she had been expecting with anything but pleasurable anticipation was a long time before it arrived. But at last it came. Mr. Claude Stanford had only now discovered her retreat, and he reproached her for cruelty in thus vanishing and leaving him to suffer much doubt and anxiety. Of course he must find where she had gone, but she wondered how he had obtained the information. She hoped that Mrs. Kearsley, falling to a golden bribe, had not betrayed her, in spite of all promises. Still more she hoped that Marian had not weakly abandoned her secret. No matter. He knew. She did not care. Never again would she fear him.

In this letter of his, she thought she could read his certainty that she had safely escaped from the orbit of his oppression. He could not threaten her here. He knew that, secure in this strong castle, she had freed herself from his base pursuit. He was driven back to a baffled politeness, an assumption of quite ordinary friendliness that sprang from the sense of his impotence any further to molest her.

'But I hope I may soon have the good fortune to see you again. Meantime I hope you will write to me.'

She burnt the letter in the cheerful library fire beneath the picture of Lord Helensburgh. No prince! Only a selfish, smiling young man—wicked too—immodestly wicked in the openness of his transgression, who could only wipe out his present faults and redeem his princely character by those future great deeds that the old librarian predicted so confidently. But how different in his careless, blue-eyed impropriety to this other! Not darkly treacherous, meanly plotting, full of brutality, fierce and sly as a beast of prey. Sinning perhaps because he moved in a world of careless sinners, too young perhaps to understand that it was his duty to fly from temptation before the wicked syrens had encompassed his fall. But not shedding that dark oppressive aura of your true villain—proving himself still frank and joyous in temperament, by the atmosphere of smiling, boyish good-fellowship that hung even about his painted effigy. Selfish, egotistical, and vain perhaps, with an impudent confidence in himself and his powers of pleasing; but one for whom it would be impossible to insult a girl by vile proposals because she chanced to cross his path, and to believe that, because she was poor and unprotected, she would not resist him.

Twice or three times in this windy month, that good and attentive Dr. Quinlan came to see her—to assure himself that the splendid cure was still working. But, having so assured himself, he had little to say. The power to talk about books seemed to have gone from him. When she told him of her studies and spoke of authors with whom he was undoubtedly familiar, he had nought of comment or criticism to offer. A dreary, vacant solemnity seemed to overcome him, and he stared at her often with a curious absent-mindedness: as though his solemn thoughts had wandered away to other and very critical cases that he had left him behind in London. On each visit she told him of her gratitude; and, when he had gone, reminded herself of the gratitude; and with the gratitude fought down the disloyal doubt whether the good young doctor's kind visits were not becoming excessively boring.

Only once did he start a new topic of conversation, and that was on his last visit of all. With a shy abruptness he suddenly asked for her advice on a question that concerned himself. He had arrived, or fancied that he had arrived, it seemed, at something like a turning-point in his career. There was a chance that he might obtain a Government appointment in one of the Crown colonies. He was assured by the big-wigs at his hospital that he really had a good chance of obtaining this post. And in many respects there were considerable attractions in the idea:

pleasant climate, a good official residence, handsome salary, and possible additional earnings from private patients. Then, too, at the end of his exile he might return just in time to relieve his Uncle James and settle down here in the quiet little family practice, and finish his days, as he had begun them, at Hawkridge. On the other hand, this would mean giving up all his higher professional hopes.

'I am not without ambition, you know,' he said really modestly, repeating what he had told her once before. 'I have managed to put in some solid work at the hospital within the last few years—and of course I am as it were in the thick of the battle. I am not without means either—a little that my father left me—just enough to keep going, and every year I do earn a little more—so that I can hang on and hope. In our profession, you know, there are always chances of doing—sooner or later—some really good work—and yet, of course, with thousands of us, our hopes come to nothing in the end. I do wish you would give me your advice.'

Then, with all the concentration of which she was capable, she considered—staunchly and conscientiously as she used to consider for a vacillating customer the choice between two blouses: a humdrum, matter-of-fact, subdued and tranquil blouse and a gay and gaudy blouse of lively and inspiriting colours. Was he really clever? What depth was there beneath that solemn surface? Was the brain-power equal to his natural kindness and his natural modesty? What truly was his chance of travelling some short but sufficient stage of that noble road that his ambition had mapped out for him? It was easier in imagination to turn oneself into a stout middle-aged customer than to put oneself in the place of a solemn young doctor. But at last she gave her advice.

'Oh, stay on the battlefield. Don't give it up. Go on hoping to do the good work. Don't barter ambition for a nice house and a pleasant climate.'

She had no doubt. He ought not to go away. Were she Dr. Shelton of Moray Street, she could not leave those poor people who trusted her, and night and day craved her aid.

'I am so glad you think that,' said Dr. Quinlan with animation: the solemnity driven away by her voice and manner. 'It is what I feel myself. Many thanks. . . . No, I won't come back to the house, thank you.'

Then Dr. Quinlan went shyly back to London; and thence launched his thunderbolt.

'I wonder,' wrote Dr. Quinlan, beginning his amazing letter

without any 'dear Miss Shelton,' attacking his subject without prelude or warning:

'I wonder if you know how deeply I love you. I think I scarcely knew myself till yesterday, although it is no exaggeration to say that I began to love you from the very beginning, that for two months my love has been a stronger feeling than I had conceived it possible that I should ever entertain in all my life.'

Then, having made his declaration in these set terms, he passed at once from emotion to business. Could she and would she marry him at once? Would she have the courage to be a poor man's wife? He was sure, he said, that she was not one to hanker after outward show. Hers was too noble a nature to permit her to attach importance to the mere pomps and vanities of wealth and station; and here he plainly hinted at such magnificence as the great house had made familiar to her. But he put before her very clearly what her life with him in London would be: going minutely into figures, giving her his income from all sources, stating private means, reciting exactly his earnings last year, the year before, with approximate estimate of earnings for eleven weeks of this year, and carefully forecasting future possibilities—a hard life perhaps at first, but with good work to be done in it and the beacon of hope to cheer them on their way.

It was an honest, manly letter, with here and there a simple stroke, a naïve blunder: as when he said Dr. James would help them financially in the next few years, because Dr. James thoroughly approved of his choice; and again when he said he did not consider her decision about the West Indies as final or binding her, for if she changed her mind he would after all apply for the post—as though she had understood that she was advising about her own future as well as his.

But, with any and all blunders, it was a fine, manly letter, and it touched her heart—when she had recovered from the shock of her surprise. Never, in all her thoughts of him, had she suspected that this was what he was thinking about. She was grateful to him, sorry for him: believing every word that he wrote of his regard to be true—incredible as it appeared. As she wrote her reply, sitting at the old lord's table, scratching out, reinstating, copying and recopying, she sought to make her refusal as gentle and soothing as might be while yet leaving it absolute.

It was something that she would remember to her dying day. This marvellous thing had happened: she had won the love of a good man. She respected and admired the good man, but she could not be the good man's wife—not next year, not in a thousand years. As she thought of it she shivered.

XXIII

SUDDENLY the atmosphere of the great house seemed to vibrate with excitement. Lady Colwyn was about to entertain a house-party; the bored servants at last had something to do: even the lady-in-waiting was, for a few mornings, comparatively busy.

It was the custom of the Most Honourable the Marquis of Stonehaven, an old Scottish lord, with his middle-aged wife, to pay an annual visit of a few days, and this year he would come to Hawkridge in the second week of April. But now from the ordinary course of events these most unusual festivities had sprung. Another couple, Lord and Lady Cullingworth, had been bidden. A certain Mrs. Gardiner had also been asked to meet the Stonehavens. She was an elderly widow who devoted her life to philanthropic works, and who was perhaps more truly a friend of the Stonehavens than of Lady Colwyn. However, Lady Colwyn approved of her highly as a well-born, eminently respectable person, whose fad for succouring indigent factory girls was a troublesome but permissible eccentricity.

Then, unexpectedly, came an immensely long telegram—three sheets of it—from Lord Helensburgh, to say that he himself would come to meet the Stonehavens, and that he wished Granny to ask two young friends of his: Lord Rotherfield and Sir John Hartnell, whose addresses he gave in full.

'Why, of course,' said Mrs. Mapleton, coming into the room with the local newspaper in her hand, 'of course, my lady, that's the week of the races and the hunt ball. *That's* what his lordship and his friends is a coming for. Here's the advertisement.'

It was astounding to observe the licence that her stern mistress allowed to the vulgar Mapleton. This servant, who was so odiously sycophantic generally, at times seemed to venture the most impudent familiarity. But perhaps this also was a part of the splendid old traditions—the common, base-born favourite to whom all things are permitted by the princess because she is believed to be faithful, whose insolence even is accepted as further proof of fidelity.

'Yes, my lady, and what's more, it won't be long now before we hear of Mrs. Arncliffe.'

'What do you mean?'

Mapleton had gone too far: the princess was angry.

'I only mean, my lady, that there's sure to be a houseful over at Hacketts, and I suppose *she'll* be there among the rest of 'em.'

'Then be good enough to keep your suppositions to yourself. Put the paper on the table. That will do.' And the favourite was dismissed the presence in disgrace.

But, alone with her lady-in-waiting, the old dame still bristled with indignation. The mere name of this house of Hacketts always made her irritable. Everything about it was distasteful and obnoxious to her. It was a modern red-brick building, a sort of fussily ornate villa, long and low, with absurd pinnacles and pepperboxes, in new grounds with white gates, about five miles on the other side of Tellhurst, and Lady Colwyn used to drive past it with averted head so that her old eyes might not be sickened by a near view of it. Here lived an entirely modern couple: Colonel and Lady Laura Cartwright. Here came the smart people, the pretty people, the rich people: the gambling, card-playing, motoring, love-making, liqueur-bibbing, drug-taking people who brought social disgrace and disaster in their train, who by their noise and vulgarity evoked those hideously vulgar diatribes against society in the public press, and whom Lady Colwyn would very willingly have seen tied to some of her beech trees and flogged by her retainers in the good old feudal way, as a hint to them to keep away from her domain. And yet here, to Hacketts, came from time to time, with almost intolerable impropriety, some illustrious personage whose duty it was to feel as Lady Colwyn felt on all these matters. The thought of Hacketts made her very angry.

'I will not know the woman,' she told Miss Shelton. 'I think I have made her understand it at last. She came simpering to my carriage door one day in Tellhurst, and accosted me —"You know my parents Lady Colwyn." Of course I know her family—but she is a disgrace to her family—I would not speak to her. "And now we are neighbours," she said. I did not answer her. I affected to be engaged with my servant—I went on talking to Mapleton, who had come out of the shop with the parcels. But go on with your writing.'

Vivien at the desk was thinking. Hacketts—Colonel Cartwright? Suddenly she remembered. This was the house where the man Stanford had been staying when he wrote to her in the autumn.

'Write to Lady Cullingworth also about the train. Lady Colwyn requests me to let you know that the most convenient

train will be— Neighbours! I do not recognise the owners of Hacketts as neighbours. It was effrontery to use the term.' Lady Colwyn had so ruffled herself that she was not yet calm enough to go on with the dictation. 'It is not one of the old county places. It is not a place at all in the old sense of the word. The Fanshawes—at Barton Court—are neighbours though twenty miles away. The Manningtrees at Britsby are neighbours. Those are the neighbours I would seek if I wished for society. Society! You will read of her society in the papers. They sometimes call her a leader of society. Doubtless she pays them to say so. That is the modern style,' and then came the characteristic touch of coarseness—'A house full of complaisant husbands, foolish young men and their paramours, and they call that Society. . . . But go on with your writing,' said Lady Colwyn, becoming calmer.

Then the post arrived, and one of the letters made her angry again.

'There. Read that. I wish you to read it carefully. It is the letter of a very impudent young woman. It almost surpasses belief.'

The letter was from the thirty-year-old daughter of the Cullingworths: that very Lady Augusta Lidstone who used to turn the blouse shop upside down and drive them all nearly mad with the telephone. Oh how different was Lady Augusta's tone to Lady Colwyn from Lady Augusta's tone to Mrs. Wardrop!

Would dear Lady Colwyn allow her to accompany her father and mother? A visit had fallen through: Lady Augusta would be left alone. 'I do hope that you will grant me this great favour, dear Lady Colwyn. For I know of course it is a *very* great favour, and mamma says I ought not to ask it. But of course I know that Hawkridge is such a palace, it is not quite the same thing as anywhere else where one more might put one out. But of course I know when a list of guests is complete it may not be convenient to add another girl. I do hope if so dear Lady Colwyn you will just say No and of course I shall understand. But I do hope you will say Yes as I shall so love to come.'

Thus the haughty Lady Augusta pleaded to the great lady.

'I will not have her here,' said Lady Colwyn. 'She is a most objectionable young person. I am sorry for Lady Cullingworth, but I cannot have her daughter here. It is grossly impudent. Had I desired her society I should have included her in my invitation. She had better go to Hacketts. I daresay she would feel quite at home there.'

Nevertheless, later, her ladyship relented.

'For her mother's sake I will suffer her presence. Take up your pen. I will not write to her myself. But, no. For her mother's sake, I will write myself.'

It was exciting—this experience of what her ladyship understood by the word 'society'—and after the first breathlessly shy plunge, it was pleasant and invigorating to the nerves. The guests assembled before dinner in the white-walled saloon: the last of the long suite of the great reception rooms. Vivien had wondered if as a theoretical member of the family she would dine with the company or join the circle after dinner, but Lady Colwyn had told her to be on duty in the saloon at eight-thirty at the latest. Dinner would be at a quarter to nine. Coming down in the famous old dress, she had passed in the long gallery two young men. They were looking at a statue of a nymph: one was tall and pale, the other was short and rather red. The tall one was the lord. By the pricking of her thumbs she knew it—something of Clara's wonderful instinct made her sure.

In the saloon there was a glitter of glass, a beautiful subdued light from innumerable wax candles, coloured reflections in the polished floor, a heavy perfume from hot-house flowers, and Lady Colwyn transfigured—so changed that one would hardly have recognised her—smiling upon her guests as gradually they drew together. She was dressed in black, with a stomacher of pearls, and seed pearls in the curious little cap that she wore upon her white hair; and she had an ebony stick with a crutch handle. She was wonderful to see—smiling, gracious, and stately: the grim old witch changed into the grandest of fairy godmothers. Vivien, standing in the background, watched her with a curious reverence—a great, great lady enthroned in her castle, gracious now to all: smiling upon the young men, as they sauntered in; smiling at Mrs. Gardiner, at Mr. Roberts, the old vicar, coming to-night without Mrs. Roberts; smiling at the colourless Lady Cullingworth, who seemed an indistinct, ghostly woman, in too solid trappings of rustling satin, vacillating as she moved across the room; smiling at Lord Cullingworth, a stooping man who warmed his hands at the crackling wood fire and laughed vacantly; smiling at Lady Stonehaven, a stumpy, sandy-haired little woman, and making room for her on the tapestried sofa; smiling at Miss Shelton, beckoning her, and with the gracious friendliness of these splendid company manners introducing to her several of the great nobles as though she had been one of the most important people present; smiling even on Lady Augusta, bold and big and haggardly radiant, with her great arms bared as for battle, who swept in late, made a

curtsey to her hostess, and then chattered with vivacity and showed her teeth and her naked bosom and her naked back and her magnificent prize-fighting arms to the two young men. She was safe inside the castle now, and the great lady smiled upon her; made her forget that she had forced her way through guarded doors; gave her a gracious pat on the arm and called her 'my dear.'

But the marquis was lamb-like. No other word in the English language could adequately describe this grand old Scottish lord. A thick-set, short man, with a high forehead and a fierce stubby beard, who shot quick glances of affection at the squat figure of his wife on the sofa, who gave a faint start of concentrating attention when anybody spoke to him and listened to what was said with an urbane deference, who moved back abruptly as though panic-stricken by the horrid idea that he had intercepted the warmth of the fire or prevented somebody from joining somebody else: and yet from him there seemed to shine a sort of lofty grandeur that made him quite the grandest figure in the room. Only to Lady Colwyn did he talk easily and without visible effort, modestly working his way back to her side after each modest retirement, and resuming the low-voiced discourse. Then he was easy—a prince talking to another prince—and the rest of the guests sank in a moment to a lower plane.

Presently, at the far end of the saloon, the doors were opened wide, disclosing the long gallery where the electric light was blazing upon white statues, dark old pictures, and gilt chairs, and Lady Colwyn marshalled the dinner procession. He who should have led the procession was missing. Lord Helensburgh had not arrived. In his place went Lord Cullingworth with the stout little marchioness. The others followed. Lord Rotherfield with Lady Cullingworth, Sir John Hartnell with Lady Augusta, the vicar with Mrs. Gardiner, rapidly marshalled and despatched upon their journey: all most strictly in accordance with the table of precedence, till the procession closed with the marquis and the lady of the house; and 'I am sorry, Miss Shelton,' said Lady Colwyn very graciously, 'that there is no gentleman to take you in, but perhaps—'

'Yes,' said Lord Stonehaven with a start; 'Miss Shelton must honour me by taking my other arm.' And he bowed deferentially as he offered his disengaged arm.

'That is very nice,' said Lady Colwyn with smiling approval of Lord Stonehaven, and a satisfied nod to Vivien which seemed to say: These are the company manners of the grand old school. You are seeing them for the first time. Have you any complaints to make?

It was wonderful. There had been no outward signs of preparation, but the great house had changed with its mistress: had put on its grand company air. The servants had multiplied themselves and were dressed in richer liveries; everywhere the electric lamps blazed; in the old stone hall there were immense pink-and-white azaleas—great trees: masses of blossom to the edge of the white velvet carpet that had been laid upon the marble pavement; in the dining-room the meaning of those three red panels was explained at last. They were filled with a dull fire of gold plate—an almost barbaric display.

At dinner a hard line seemed to draw itself between the old school and the new: on one side, Lady Colwyn, the Stonehavens, and Mrs. Gardiner; on the other, Lady Augusta, her mamma, and everybody else—except the vicar, who did not count, who was a dummy, something in black to put between two ladies' dresses that did not even say grace before meat. The old school were low-voiced and rather silent: the new school were gay and chattering, almost noisy as soon as they sat down, turning in their chairs and exclaiming like children in rapturous admiration of something unusual that Lady Augusta had just discovered. 'Oh look! Aren't they too lovely?'

On tables down the side of the room were a number of dwarf peach-trees, in gold pots that carried a dome of wide silver hoops over which the long green leaves and the big round fruit trailed down. They were like artificial trees grown in silver crinolines—such toys as one might look for in a fairy palace.

'Colwyn's peaches, ah yes,' said Lady Colwyn. 'It was a hobby of my husband's—yes, they are pretty.'

'Poor Henry,' said Lord Stonehaven with grave tenderness. 'Poor Henry. He loved his garden and his library.'

'I never saw anything like them,' cried Lady Augusta with exuberant rapture. 'They are too wonderful. Such a splendid idea!' And while Lady Augusta, leading the new school, continued in a state of noisy delight, Lord Stonehaven talked in grave, low tones to his hostess.

He wondered that Lady Colwyn had not a telegraph office in the house. He had a post and telegraph office in his old Scottish castle, and he had found it a source of convenience and comfort. But Lady Colwyn did not care for this idea. The Post Office was a vulgar, troublesome department. 'And I do not ask favours.'

'Quite so,' said Lord Stonehaven. 'No more do I. But these things arrange themselves on quite a business footing. And you know, though one hears so much against the Post

Office, I must say, personally, I have never found them unreasonable. There is a great deal in approaching them properly, I believe,' he added modestly.

Vivien, eating her soup, smiled as she listened. Really they were splendid, these great nobles. And she thought of the Post Office forms about lost letters, etc., the entanglements of official routine in which the public blundered and were tripped up and rendered helpless and hopeless by this department, and then of the proper approach of a sometime cabinet minister.

But Lady Augusta fastened on to this plan of a private telegraph office, persistently, reiterating, churning all sense out of it. It seemed that in their love of expense the new school were grateful to the keen intuition of the marquis which could detect something wanting even here—some more pounds to spend, still something to buy which ordinary people could not have.

So silly, thought Vivien, and so innately snobbish—and yet a snobbishness a little redeemed by its absolute childishness.

'Oh, you really *must* have a telegraph office.'

'Must I? Why?'

'Oh,'—Lady Augusta, eager, flushing, excited—'don't you know, it would be so useful—under your own roof. Oh, I think you must have one.'

'That's what you think my dear?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Ah, and *I* think differently.'

Thus, smiling most graciously, Lady Colwyn cut the thread of the nonsense as with a hatchet, and Lady Augusta turned her big bare breast to her jolly red-faced little neighbour, Sir John Hartnell, and for a time devoted her shining teeth, red lips, and the rather haggard radiance of her thirty-year-old charms to him.

Vivien was sitting between Mrs. Gardiner and the pale young lord. The young man was very easy to get on with. He was a happy and contented young noble, very pleased with all the world, able to talk about anything and everything. He told her how pleased he was to come. 'So jolly of Helensburgh to have thought of asking me. Only wish he had been able to come himself. But no doubt he'll turn up in time for the ball. Such a lark to get a few days with hounds when the fun's over everywhere else. Though of course it's only coffee-housing.'

Then Sir John chimed in from across the table.

'And coffee-housing is a very good thing too when you can't get anything better. And I dare say they'll give us some rare gallops over the downs,' and he laughed and beamed. 'I hope

they haven't eaten all the foxes—or, if they have, that they've got some commercial travellers.'

He also seemed a happy young man, as determined to enjoy himself as a child of ten out for a holiday. Vivien was sorry she was so crassly ignorant of sporting matters that she could not give him any information. Across the table he told her that he was going to have a ride in the hunt races. Helensburgh had assured him there was at least one race open to visitors, and he had brought a wonderful horse upon which he anticipated having a great frolic.

'He really is a wonder. Rushes all his fences, but between them can't get along faster than you could roll your hat. Helensburgh has given me six to four we don't do the journey —without time limit,' and so on.

But Lady Augusta thought he had talked across the table sufficiently, and with much slang technicality soon absorbed him again.

Lord Rotherfield could talk of everything—including books. He told Miss Shelton the titles of various books that she ought to read at once. It was shocking, he said, not to have read them.

'Yes, I quite agree with you that the old books are the best. Still you know, it's wrong not to keep up with the times,' and he pulled a menu card out of its gold frame, and on the back of it scribbled the names of some notable modern works—French, German, and English: memoirs, travels, metaphysics, and one or two novels. Really an erudite young noble! 'There, that's a nailing good book—*Where Life flows Deep*—though it *is* a novel.'

'Oh yes,' said Mrs. Gardiner, 'that is a grand book.'

Lady Cullingworth had also read it: in a moment the conversation became general, and everybody was discussing this last new fashionable novel and its brilliantly talented author, this unknown Miss Hopkins.

'Oh a clinker,' said Sir John, beaming. 'Sort of book that does you real good—makes you wish you were good always.'

'She is only a girl,' said Mrs. Gardiner. 'Quite a girl, they tell me. But her knowledge of the world is incredible.'

'And all the poor part, don't you know. The shops and all that. They say it's absolutely true.'

'Absolutely,' said Mrs. Gardiner. 'It is a perfectly true picture of the life of shop-girls of the humbler class. It is exactly what my own girls have told me—I mean the girls at my club. Poor girls, no one could guess what they have to

suffer in some of our bad London shops—far more than in the factories.'

Vivien was sure now. She had suspected it all along, but had wanted to be quite sure. This was none other than that Mrs. Gardiner, the benevolent friend of poor Mrs. Maitland. She must speak to her about dear old Maitey.

At the top of the table, Lady Colwyn was smiling and nodding as she listened. What talk was this of shops, poor serfs, overcrowding, ill-ventilated bedrooms? Were these the best topics that could be chosen by her guests? But the grand old company manners constrained her to hear them with a smile, and when my Lord Stonehaven also spoke of the book the polite use of the hatchet became impossible. They had brought her a little golden bowl of soup, and with the soup and some thin toast she maintained a pretence of eating while the long sequence of dainty dishes was offered to her guests. The soup was her dinner, and while she nibbled and sipped, her keen eyes watched over the comfort of the guests. In the corner of the room by the screen, Mr. Richards himself was present, watching as chief of the household, assuring himself that all was in order, that the service was smoothly perfect. From Mr. Jarvis the butler to William the youngest footman, all were watching, ministering to each requirement ere the guest could realise that anything was required. And yet, when the vicar shyly glanced over his shoulder, only Lady Colwyn saw and knew and told a servant that the vicar wanted apolinaris wherewith to dilute his champagne.

'I think,' said Vivien, 'you know Mrs. Maitland.'

'What Mrs. Maitland?'

Then Vivien explained that she meant her dear old schoolmistress who had the school at Southbourne.

'She so often spoke of you—and always with such regard.'

But it seemed that poor old Maitey had preserved a much fresher memory of a few chance meetings many years ago than had Mrs. Gardiner. Obviously she had forgotten Mrs. Maitland. With an effort, however, she recalled her existence.

'Oh yes. I do remember her. She was governess to relatives of mine—a pretty girl. I remember her perfectly. She made a very unfortunate marriage, and then I lost sight of her. But we met again—I forget where. And she had a school. Yes. It is kind of her to remember me. I hope she is very well.'

'She is dead.'

'Oh, I am sorry to hear that.'

'She was so kind to me. I was at the school. I can't tell you how good—how very good she was to me.'

'Yes, I'm sure she was. She was a good kind woman'; and Mrs. Gardiner turned to the vicar and went on talking about overcrowding and London landlords. She had looked at Vivien with kind but dreamy eyes, in which there was no awakening interest, and her fingers softly drummed upon the table in an absent-minded manner. She was very good to poor girls who needed help in London, but she was not cordial, it seemed, to poor girls who sat next her at dinner in the country.

Presently this subject of the great London landlords was taken up by others. Lord Cullingworth had an expiring lease, and his dear old house in Cleveland Row was threatened with demolition. He thought it a great hardship. As a landlord himself, he thought London tenants were very badly treated on many estates. Then in a moment Vivien was in a position of strength: able to express opinions based on solid experience. They were speaking of the vast property of Lord Eaglesham and of the great changes that would come to his estate before very long.

'Lord Eaglesham is the very worst landlord in the world,' she told Lord Rotherfield. 'Lord Eaglesham ought to be ashamed of himself.'

'My dear. You don't know what you are talking about.'

Lady Colwyn's smile had vanished: only the 'my dear' was left of all the fine company manners. She frowned at Miss Shelton. A silence had fallen. Lord Stonehaven was looking at Miss Shelton very gravely. Everybody except the vicar looked at Miss Shelton.

'Oh, but I beg your pardon,' said Miss Shelton, blushing, but very resolute: 'I do really know what I am talking about. I have lived in his houses and heard what the tenants say—quite poor people to whom he is wickedly oppressive.'

'Pray be silent,' said Lady Colwyn in so terrible a voice that Vivien was forced to obey the command.

Lord Rotherfield and the genial Sir John began to chatter in a sprightly incoherent fashion to break the awe-inspiring silence, and Vivien with bowed head and outraged feelings ate; if not the bread, the dessert-biscuits and hothouse fruit of dependence and mortification.

Why was she not entitled to give her opinion? Just when she was really enjoying herself and beginning to talk freely, it was brutal of the great lady to humiliate her thus publicly—to remind her that only in theory was she a member of the family, that she was there only on sufferance. She would not say another word.

But after dinner, as she sat silent and aloof, no less a per-

sonage than the most honourable the Marquis of Stonehaven, making a series of retreats from the chattering circle, came and talked to her. He talked to her very easily, with a simple, frank, and yet shy friendliness that was most engaging. He knew of course of her dependent position, and it seemed now that he could be quite at home with the very great and the very humble, but that on all intermediate planes the grand simplicity of his character rendered him ill at ease.

'I want to tell you about my kinsman—Eaglesham. When our kind hostess checked you, it was on my account. She feared that your words would cause pain. But of course I knew that you spoke without knowledge of the facts. It is a very sad story. May I tell you?'

Then, in the simplest words, he told her all about the bad, bad landlord.

'He was my greatest friend. As young men we were inseparable. It was an honour to be the friend of such a man—the noblest, highest-minded man that ever breathed. He loved my sister, and they were to be married in a week when—he went mad. It was a sad tragedy. My poor sister died . . . forty years ago Miss Shelton, and he is living still. Not one gleam of reason in all those years. I go and see him as often as I can. He does not know me—and soon that noble spirit will go out in darkness. . . .

'So you see, he is not responsible for any bad management of those houses of his. I dare say the property is mismanaged. Trustees, they say, are always bad managers. But there have been great difficulties to contend with. A ground landlord has often much less power than you would suppose. It will be all put right when the leases fall in. There will be no oppression. I can promise you that. I am one of the trustees.'

And Vivien bowed her head—in shame now. Three great stinges she had known—Mrs. Maitland, Mrs. Wardrop, Lord Eaglesham: each in turn had been acquitted. Oh, never again will she judge. Henceforth, no matter what shape the figures may assume in her passage through the dream-grotto, she will hail none as a *stinge*.

Lord Stonehaven sat talking to her for a long time: until nearly the end of the evening, when his place at her side was taken by Mrs. Gardiner.

'We must have a little chat together before bedtime,' said Mrs. Gardiner most cordially. Her manner had completely changed: she was another, a new Mrs. Gardiner.

'I was so struck by what you said at dinner about the nasty houses and the poor people who lived in them. And I made

Lady Colwyn tell me—I hope you don't mind—and she says that you yourself—like a brave, good girl—once worked in a shop. Did you, dear?'

'Yes.'

'Do tell me all about it,' and Mrs. Gardiner took Vivien's hand and laid it on her lap, and began to pat it affectionately, while the eyes that had seemed so dreamy shone with sympathetic interest. 'Do tell me. It wasn't just for a foolish freak—some silly squabble with relations? You really and truly did it—like a dear courageous girl—to maintain yourself? You were just working for your living.'

'Oh yes. But my father helped me—as much as he could.'

'That was very proper. But nevertheless it was hard work, dear.' And still patting the hand, she described her own life among her girls, her girls club, her girls' libraries, debating societies, and gymnasium. Miss Shelton must come and see her and the club. Miss Shelton must come and stay with her for a few days at her house in Greville Place. Miss Shelton must accept her as a friend—a real staunch friend, with no nonsense in the friendship, a friend to turn to in any trouble, no matter what.

'You'll not set me down as a grumpy, snappy old woman because I didn't make myself pleasant at dinner. You see, dear, *I* set *you* down, in my own mind, as just the ordinary fashionable young lady, and I do so dislike ordinary fashionable young ladies. But now, you understand how different my feeling is.'

This was the real Mrs. Gardiner of early and long-stored tradition. She was kind to poor girls—when recognised as such—whether she met them in town or country. And what a lamb to mistake the humble dependent for one of the great world! What a delightful, gratifying compliment to the well-sustained power of the old, old dress!

Vivien went to bed happy and smiling after her first evening with her employer's house-party. They were all nice—these nobles—when you understood them,—each and all, beneath the outer trappings, essentially lamb-like. All of them—except Lady Augusta!

Yet it was Lady Augusta who absorbed her all next day, who offered the most interesting and amazing study in character of the whole party. She was horrid at first and made one hate her; then, in spite of resistance, absorbed one: gradually forced one to think of her to the exclusion of every one else.

The young men were gone 'coffee-housing' with the hounds; and Lady Augusta, in a very short gown that always showed her

ankles and often showed the calves of her legs, was mooning about the garden dolefully whistling, and with her walking-stick viciously cutting off the heads of jonquils and narcissus, when she found Vivien, and began to clamour for Vivien's friendship.

'I say. Why do you want to cut me, Miss Shelton? You wouldn't speak to me last night. I tried to get hold of you again and again.'

This of course was not true. She had stared at Miss Shelton across the table, but had not addressed one word to her.

'I remembered you directly,' said Lady Augusta. 'What on earth made you come here? Surely this is worse than Mrs. Wardrop's—to be shut up in this gloomy barracks with that stupid old woman,' and then she complained of everything. Why had not more people been asked? Why was not amusement provided for them? She could see that the mistress of the great house did not look after things properly, letting the servants go to the devil. She thought the dinner last night was execrable—far too long and wretchedly cooked. No wonder people dreaded coming here.

And Vivien thought she was utterly horrid. O ingrate to blaspheme against the noble health-restoring food! And why grovel and plead to be bidden if this was what she thought?

'I say,' said Lady Augusta, 'don't be rusty, Miss Shelton. Do let's be pals while we are stuck here together. You and I are the only girls here. And it is so hateful having no one to talk to.'

Then she burst out about the house called Hacketts.

'They are having plenty of fun over there. I envy them. I wonder who she has got. I only know of three or four. Charlie Whitfield, Mabel Rice, Claudie Stanford, Mrs. Arncliffe —and Harry Helensburgh of course.'

'Lord Helensburgh is not there. He is coming here.'

'I bet you a pony he isn't. If the old woman wanted him, she'd better have asked his lady-love,' and Lady Augusta laughed.

Then she would talk about this dreadful scandal. And Vivien hated her. She was as bad as Mrs. Goff.

'Oh, my dear girl, that woman has played her cards well. He'll never get away from her now. It has been going on too long. They say her husband is dying, and when he does, you mark my words, Helensburgh will marry her—in spite of everything. I admire her in a way, because she has never faltered—she has just laughed at the world. And, *you* see, she'll get her reward. You see. She'll be Duchess of Morecambe, and then we shall forget *everything*. *She*'ll be forgiven all right. Yet I

could tell you things about her that would make your hair come out of curl. What jolly hair you have! Mine has been tumbling out in handfuls. I'm so worried, I don't wonder'; and she walked on, giving a swishing blow at the poor flowers whenever she saw a tall one.

She was a fine big girl—a grand creature really—her long legs swinging free from the large hips that made her waist look so small, with her great shoulders well set back, and a superb carriage of the head—the ease of a grand physique giving her the haughty bearing admired by Clara. Handsome too, but something indefinably wrong about her: a haggard restlessness, dark rims round the eyes, lips pallid now in the April sunlight—a big overgrown idle child that has got into bad ways, for whose idleness Satan has been finding mischief.

'Oh I say, do let's be pals,' and she turned suddenly and took Vivien by the arm. 'If you knew how much I wanted a pal now—some one to confide in—some one to advise me—you wouldn't be so rusty.'

And from that moment Vivien began to feel that, however unreasonable it might be, she rather liked Lady Augusta; and from that moment until a very late hour at night Lady Augusta entirely and completely absorbed her.

'What I ask myself,' said Lady Augusta with a toss of the head and a jerky laugh, 'is this. Have I the right to spoil a man's life, merely because I don't love him?'

She had plunged immediately into the deep stream of her most private affairs.

'. . . Well as to ever loving him, I can't say,' and she laughed again. 'I don't believe I ever should. He is not my style—not the sort of man I ever *have* cared about. But then should a girl only consider herself? What do you think?'

Vivien rather thought a girl should.

'I ought to tell you it would be all right as a match, don't you know. Mamma would be on his side. Well, she *is* on his side. Oh *she*'d sacrifice *my* feelings in the matter like a bird.'

Then lunch intervened. But directly after lunch Lady Augusta insisted on taking Vivien for a walk in order that she might go on with the story.

'I dare say,' continued Lady Augusta, striding across the park, 'it would be easy enough to say yes if there had never been anybody else—but when there has, don't you know, and you haven't really got over it! But when you see a man so desperately keen about it, when you see it lies with you whether his life is to be spoilt for ever—well what are you to do? Look here, I'll tell you about the other one.'

The other one she had really loved, been mad about; and he had been stark staring mad about her for years. But it appeared that there had been some mysterious impediment to their getting promptly married and then abating the madness in the usual way by long years of happy union. 'No, it was not money—but just as good a reason. Well, he was a soldier for one thing.' And now he had gone to India with his regiment and half the world lay between them. . . . No, there had been no promise to wait for him. No vows, or pledges—farewell for ever.

'There you are, don't you see,' said Lady Augusta striding up the hill so fast that suddenly she put her hand to her side and began to puff and pant for breath. 'What's a girl to do? I want to do the right—the right thing. Don't—want—to—spoil—his—life. Oh—I say—what condition you must be in—I'm—absolutely—pumped.'

They climbed to the higher ground at a more reasonable pace, and stood upon the bare downs, looking back at the vast map-like view—the woods with a purple bloom given to them by the swelling buds, the park lands green and bright, the roofs of the great house glittering in the sunlight, and the coloured flag a black spot floating above the dark battlements. Lady Augusta, flushed with exercise, drawing deep breaths and shading her eyes with her hand, was really a grand figure—an immense overgrown foolish child with no real harm in her.

'I say,' said Lady Augusta, still shading her eyes. 'You haven't twigged who I'm talking about?'

'No. How on earth could I?'

'Oh I thought you might have twigged it—last night. He is here, you know—in the house.'

'Is he? Not Sir John Hartnell?'

'Yes.'

The jolly red-faced little man! Extraordinary! Then how unruffled he seemed in the face of this peril—the spoilt life.

After the walk Vivien was carried off to Lady Augusta's bedroom. The young men were still coffee-housing.

'Oh, I say, do. I suppose we can have some tea in my room. The old woman doesn't want you, does she? Well never mind about the others. *They're* all right.'

It was astounding to observe the litter and confusion created by Lady Augusta in one day's occupation of the splendid apartment. The most energetic servants could not keep an appearance of tidiness and order about this young woman. It seemed that every time she changed her dress she wrecked the room, pulling out every one of her frocks, leaving every drawer

open, spilling water, spilling scent, scattering white powder, overturning chairs, cigarette boxes, pin-trays, and spreading the available area from the pillows of the bed to the hearth-rug and coal-scuttle with small articles of costume—gloves, odd shoes, a stocking with a hole in it, hair-nets, hats and ties, etc. The sedate maid that Vivien remembered at the London house was now hard at work reinstating the contents of the open wardrobe; but Lady Augusta dismissed her.

'Oh leave off fussing and get out. Can't you see you are in the way? Do get out.'

And silently and sedately the maid retired.

'Look here,' said Lady Augusta leaning back in a deep chair, smoking a cigarette and blowing the smoke through her nostrils. 'Now we are pals, do call me Augusta and let me call you—by the by—what *is* your name? You've done me all the good in the world. It is so horrid having no one to confide in—when you are feeling miserable—and worried to death—and utterly wretched.'

And most unexpectedly Lady Augusta threw the cigarette into the fire and burst into tears.

'I am a fool, aren't I?' she said, drying her eyes. 'But of course you don't understand. I *am* so worried.'

Then, little by little, there came out further and still further particulars of this intricate love-story.

'You see, he wrote to me the moment he knew he was coming here, so I knew he was desperately keen about it. So I schemed and plotted to get here—I had to ask to be asked. And now, after all, I don't believe he's half as keen about it as he was in the beginning. I shouldn't mind—I don't believe—if I didn't know why it is.'

'Why is it?'

'Oh, a lot of beasts have been telling him things.'

'But what things could they tell him?'

'Oh, a pack of lies of course. You don't know what beasts people are. What do they mind if they spoil a girl's life? Not they!'

'But if you don't care about him.'

'I do, I do, I do,' and Lady Augusta began to cry again.

'I wasn't keen at first, but I am now.' This was when the eyes had been dried again. 'I am not mad about him as I was about—about the other one. But I do like him more and more. I've begun to count upon it. I swear I'd be a clinking good wife to him. He'd never get a better. And it is so hateful to be disappointed when you've counted on a thing. If he chucks it now, it will just spoil my life. I shan't get over it.

I know I shan't. What beasts people are to try and put a man off.'

Then came further information. The bar to a happy union with that other one, was the unlucky fact that he was already a married man. Vivien became very grave when she heard this.

'I am a fool, I know,' said Lady Augusta. 'But when the regiment was sailing, I went down to see him off. And when it came to say good-bye I made a fool of myself—crying before them all. I simply howled—and you can't wonder—when you know your life is spoilt for ever by the best pal you ever had in all the world going to India for years and years. . . .

'But I believe people noticed it—and talked. And of course his wife's people, like beasts, told every one. And I know somebody wrote to my mother and told her. And I am sure they have been talking to *him*—just to put him off.'

Then that night, when the ladies went to bed, Vivien was dragged into Lady Augusta's room again, and again Lady Augusta wept.

'Vivien, he has been simply horrid to me this evening—and now I am getting fonder of him every minute. I know I should simply love him when once we were married. It is wicked to come between and divide us. Oh do help me. Do, do help me.'

'I wish I could. But how can I?'

'Talk to him. Tell him I really am fond of him. Yes, tell him that—tell him anything; but don't let both our lives be spoilt.'

Vivien liked her now, and was absorbingly sorry for her; but she could not undertake to talk to Sir John.

'Why not? Oh do. Now's the time if you are a pal, to prove it,' and she threw her arms round Vivien's neck and sobbed and clamoured for help in her distress.

But there were dark threads in the tangle of Lady Augusta's love-story. This other man, and the 'pack of lies!' Before they parted at a late hour, Vivien had spoken very seriously to her new friend.

'Unless,' said Vivien, 'you are sure that you have quite done with the man who went to India it would be a very unfair thing to Sir John to marry him. Suppose the man comes back from India and you find you are still fond of him?'

'All over and done with,' said Lady Augusta, looking into the bedroom fire. 'Vivien,' and she turned, and her eyes glowed. 'I swear I'll make him a clinking good wife. The best wife he'll ever get.'

'Suppose,' said Vivien thoughtfully, 'Sir John asked you about the other one?'

'I should tell him,' said Lady Augusta shading her eyes from the fire. 'I should tell him we had been pals—real good pals. *You* tell him that if you like.'

Then at last the sleepy maid was summoned from the corridor to put Lady Augusta to bed.

All the guests, except Mrs. Gardiner, were going to the Hunt ball. Even the Stonehavens were going. Lady Stonehaven had very unexpectedly expressed the opinion that it would be amusing. She always enjoyed seeing young people enjoy themselves. Lord Stonehaven, darting an affectionate glance at her, had immediately announced that it would be a rare treat to him to attend a dance.

'Miss Shelton, will you keep a dance for me—to sit out I mean?' said Lord Stonehaven.

'Miss Shelton,' said Lady Colwyn, 'will stay at home with Mrs. Gardiner and me.'

'Oh I say,' said Lady Augusta, confidentially. 'It is hateful—you not coming too. What an old beast Lady Colwyn is to want to keep you at home.'

All but my Lord Stonehaven in turn expressed regret that Miss Shelton was not going to the dance; and Miss Shelton, like a polite Cinderella, said that she was not very fond of dancing and did not in the least mind staying at home—which was of course her proper place; but that she would enjoy hearing all about the ball afterwards as much as if she had been present at it.

Nevertheless, her heart beat fast with happy excitement when in the afternoon Lady Colwyn informed her that she was not to be the Cinderella of the party.

'Lord Stonehaven desires that you should go. It had not occurred to me that you would care about it.'

'Look here,' said Lady Augusta eagerly, 'you must wear one of my dresses.'

'Wasn't the one I wore last night good enough?' asked Vivien.

'Oh yes. That was all right. But do let me dodge you out with one of mine. Come to my room. We are just the same size.'

Lady Augusta, turning her room upside down, driving the unhappy maid to despair, pulling out her ball-dresses one after another, would have her own way. It was impossible to withstand her.

'You must, you must, you must. I want you to look your

best. Here. Try this on. You'll see it will fit you like a glove. I tell you, you must, you must.'

Lady Augusta was to wear a pink frock—a most beautiful gossamer, tulley, chiffony, lacey thing of an exquisite faint rose colour that could not by any possibility clash with the red coat of a partner, and she offered Vivien a magnificent combination of white satin and silver beads and silver embroidery and point d'Alençon lace.

'There! What did I tell you?' cried Lady Augusta. 'Like a glove—and if there's anything wrong, Norman will fix you up.'

It fitted like a rather loose glove, and, behind Vivien's back, the discreet maid, with her mouth full of pins, was already taking in reefs.

'Upon my word,' said Lady Augusta. 'You do look stunning in that. . . . I say—would you mind if, after all, I wore it myself, and you wore the pink? You know how much I want to look my best to-night. . . . You *are* good-natured. But *no*, your hair isn't dark enough for pink. Pink is supposed to suit me. Oh do advise me. No. Don't advise me. I'll stick to the pink.'

But not contented with providing a dress, Lady Augusta insisted upon furnishing jewellery.

'You must, you must, you must.'

She had some beautiful baubles that had been left to her, she said, by a great aunt; and very soon she fastened round Vivien's neck a grand ornament formed by six rows of small pearls, with bands and clasps of diamonds—a glittering collar three inches deep. Lady Augusta would adorn herself with a necklace and rope of larger pearls that were simply lovely, though without the flash and fire of the diamonds. But, looking at the diamond fire, Lady Augusta was seized with an indecision.

'I say; I really think you had better have this, and let me wear that.'

'Oh, do wear them both,' said Vivien. 'You are awfully kind, but I hate the idea of going dressed up in your jewels.'

'No,' said Lady Augusta. 'I can't wear both. No, I'll stick to the pearls. You see, it isn't really right for an unmarried girl to wear diamonds. Mamma hates to see me in them. But for you—just for this once—it won't matter. You look stunning in them.'

That evening Lady Augusta's silent maid came to Vivien to dress her. First she did her hair; then she braced her into the tight-reefed white satin; then she clasped the diamonds and

pearls about her neck; and when Vivien looked at herself in the cheval glass, her eyes grew round in wonder. Could it be possible? For her, they had wrought the Cinderella-miracle: no fairy godmother could have done it more handsomely.

At a quarter to ten Lady Colwyn's immense omnibus was at the great door. It swallowed them all, and there was room for many more. The two postillions ceased to rein in the four pawing horses; the little groom on the box took off the break; the tall footman had clambered to his side; and away they clattered and rumbled—in a blaze of electric light beneath the stone screen, in the light again with a rattle and lurch through the park gates; then away across the sleeping country-side: postillions bobbing, lamps flaring, wheels grinding and crunching, away, away, through the darkness and the silence to the music and the light. And Vivien in a corner of the great 'bus was throbbing, glowing with childish happiness, childish excitement—Cinderella from Marefield Street, tricked out by the fairies, on her way to the ball to meet the wicked, wicked prince who had deserted his castle—for Hacketts.

XXIV

AT Tellhurst, the fairies had been waving their wands in the market-place. The St. Keverne Hotel was unrecognisable, it would seem, even to the townspeople as they stood in the little street to gape at the fine company, to listen to the scraping fiddles and the rhythmic beat of dancing shoes, or, peering upward, to dazzle themselves with the yellow light that came from the long windows of their old assembly rooms. Red carpet in the hall and up the creaking old stairs; palms and evergreens and banks of flowers, arranged by the munificent and always ready Mr. Ferguson; string band of Royal Artillery; pink coats, blue coats, one buff coat; glittering buttons, diamond tiaras, waving fans, flashing eyes; music of fiddles and reeds, music of laughing voices,—fairyland. At once she was dancing, with Lord Rotherfield as partner in romping lancers at the top of the big room, among all the great people, mixed up already with the Hacketts party; dancing with Lord Helensburgh, who capered like a schoolboy; hand in hand with Lady Laura, a showy, noisy, painted lady; hand in hand with the famous Mrs. Arncliffe, who did not recognise her; hand in hand with Mr. Stanford, who did, who squeezed her fingers and whispered, whose eyes suddenly set on fire never left her; nearly twirled off her feet by the over-exuberant and over-vigorous Sir John Hartnell; but, throughout the dance, wildly excited, unreasoningly happy and grateful to the fairies.

Certainly, with her necklace and white satin, she looked—in the Bauermann phrase—as well as another. All who did not know her accepted her without question as a member of the great world: one of the radiant, dazzling race who annually came over from Hacketts to outshine the poor local lights, to make the local young men comport themselves as foolish, blundering moths, to make the local young ladies blink in owlish bewilderment.

But the sight of the low-necked bodice, the pearls, diamonds, and silver beads, caused Mrs. Roberts, the wife of the vicar, to turn up her eyes in horrified surprise. Sliding along the rout seats, dodging behind the dancers, and making dangerous little

rushes, Mrs. Roberts had worked her way up the room until she was in a position to recall herself to the memory of the great Lady Stonehaven.

'I dined with my husband during your last visit at Hawkridge,' and she glanced at Miss Shelton. Perhaps it was Miss Shelton's fault that she had not been asked to dine on this occasion.

'Is not that Miss Shelton almost too much dressed—except for the bodice, which is surely—well almost indelicate? But I mean the beads and the sham jewellery. Of course,' added Mrs. Roberts sycophantically, 'I mean for one in her position. It does seem to me—injudicious.'

The great lady's reply, however, only added to the distress of Mrs. Roberts.

'I think Miss Shelton looks very nice indeed. She is a very nice girl. My husband and I have quite fallen in love with her.'

And that was all the great Lady Stonehaven had to say. Really she had come to watch the young people enjoy themselves, and not to talk to the wife of the vicar. She was deeply interested in watching the beautiful Mrs. Arncliffe. Sliding along the rout seat away from poor Mrs. Roberts, she tapped Lady Cullingworth with her fan, and together the two matrons discussed the famous beauty, as she pirouetted before them. She was beautiful—they both agreed—but to-night looking patently wicked—a snarer of hearts, a diabolical enchantress dressed in red—the true Satanic colour—with some wonderful rubies. 'I have never seen them before,' said Lady Cullingworth. 'And who else could have given them to her? Rubies of that size must have cost a fortune. . . . Oh yes—Absolutely infatuated. . . . Well, hasn't he proved it by going to Lady Laura's instead of coming to his own home?'

Lady Stonehaven was deeply shocked, but deeply interested. Only the biggest scandals reached her in her simple life in the remote Scottish castle, where scandal was never talked by the noble owners. But this was holiday time.

'Oh do point him out to me,' she said, when Lady Cullingworth told her the subsidiary scandal caused by Mrs. Arncliffe's habit of relying too much upon the chaperonage of her cousin, Mr. Claude Stanford.

'Of course you know: in the past, it was not *one*; it was half a dozen. But since the reign of H. began, there has only been talk of this other—the cousin. There, the tall dark man talking to Miss Shelton!'

'Yes, yes, I see him now.'

'A really bad man you know,' said Lady Cullingworth. 'A dreadful reputation! He was in the Guards, but I believe they turned him out. I wonder who introduced him to Miss Shelton. I wonder if he had the effrontery to speak to her without an introduction. It is just what he would do.'

'No,' Miss Shelton was saying to Mr. Stanford on the other side of the room, 'I cannot dance with you. My programme is full.'

'But there are no programmes.'

'I am engaged all the evening.'

He followed her about; he bit his moustache; his eyes had a red light in them; he tried to whisper hateful praise of her appearance; when she sat beside Lady Stonehaven he brought Mrs. Arncliffe to talk to her and frighten away her protecting great ladies so that he might have space in which to pester her: but he did not spoil her evening. To-night she could laugh at his scowling face. She hated him, but never again would she fear him.

'Claude, why did you make me speak to that girl?' said Mrs. Arncliffe angrily. 'You really are disgusting—'

'I want you to help me. Get hold of her, get her away from those people and make her dance with me.'

'Do your own dirty work,' said Mrs. Arncliffe.

'See,' said Mrs. Roberts, frozen out at the top of the room and now talking to the old vicar. That Miss Shelton is dancing and sitting out with *everybody*. She is making herself *most* conspicuous. As I told you long ago, she has no notion of the fitness of things. I believe every word of all what I told you. I heard Lord Helensburgh ask her for a dance, and she answered in the most impudent manner. "You ought to have asked me sooner, but you can have number sixteen, if you like—if we haven't gone before that." Would you believe it?'

'Oh never mind Miss Shelton,' said the old vicar. 'One would think there was nobody else to look at.'

But Mrs. Roberts could not dismiss the lady-in-waiting from her thoughts.

'Would you believe it?' she told the vicar at last. 'She has gone down to supper with Lord Stonehaven. I call it outrageous.'

Then, after supper, came the dance to which she had been looking forward with growing apprehension. The jolly little red-faced man, Sir John Hartnell, was for the second time to be her partner. Her heart sank as she took his arm. It seemed that the fairies, when sending her to the ball, had, in the fashion of fairy tales, set her a preposterous task to perform. She might

go and have a night's delirious enjoyment on one condition. Ere the ball came to an end, she must tweak the nose of the Emperor, or steal three hairs from the wig of the Dowager-Empress, or what not fantastic, monstrous, and absurd. Now as the moment approached and she thought of her promise to 'tackle' the young man about Lady Augusta, her heart sank.

Yes, she was rather tired—after one turn—and would like to sit out if they could find a nice quiet place away from everybody.

'I really, want, want to talk to you about—about something,' she stammered feebly.

They found the quiet place at the end of one of the Inn corridors—a rout seat against the wall, with Mr. Ferguson's palms on each side, and a Chinese lantern hanging in front of them: a position for sitting-out contrived with unconscious art, in which, by reason of the arrangement of the lanterns, sitters-out could see and yet not be seen.

'Sir John, if you will let me, I do so want to talk to you about—Lady Augusta.'

She had begun in fear and trembling, but immediately the good, kind little man made her task extraordinarily more easy than any one could have dared hope.

'Do,' he said eagerly. '. . . Mind? Not a bit. It's awfully kind of you—and I'm only too grateful for your sympathy. You've seen which way the wind was blowing, eh? Well, I confess at once. I *am* very much in love with her.'

He said this gravely—a little man changed in a moment, dropping his laughing, jovial mask, showing her the real Sir John as, with bowed head and his clasped hands between his knees, he listened to all she said.

'You honestly think she is fond of me?'

'I am sure she is.'

'A girl ought to be very fond of a man before she consents to be his wife. A girl oughtn't to marry a man unless she is sure there is no reason why he shouldn't marry her—unless she is sure she will make him a good wife.'

'She would make you the best wife you could find.'

'Look here, Miss Shelton. You compel me to trust you—and to speak very seriously. This is no joking matter. It is life and death—to a man. On my honour, I am desperately in love with her. But—if I wasn't sure, if there was any doubt, I'd rather shoot myself than do it. Now, on *your* honour. Is she straight?'

'Oh Sir John—what do you mean?'

'You know very well. This is no time to be shocked—You

began it, and I tell you it is life and death to me . . . I believe you know—Well, on your honour, tell me the truth.'

Vivien's thoughts were set whirling by the man's intent eyes and the strength of emotion behind the low voice.

'You've heard the talk. I believe you know the truth,' he went on. 'There was a man. Well, what about him? What about Leeswood?'

'Yes. They were friends—very great friends; but nothing more. Oh Sir John, how *can* you think such dreadful things?'

She answered firmly and looked at him with steadfast eyes, but still her thoughts were busily at work. Lady Augusta shading her face from the fire; Marian; all those other girls; and Miss Bauermann:—Lady Augusta was singularly wanting in *reticenz*! No. Whatever that inner unconscious self might hint of doubt and suspicion, she must be, she *would* be sure that she could say what he wanted her to say.

'I am quite certain that it is all over—that there was nothing wrong in it—that you should never listen to anything that any one says against her.'

'You give me your word of honour that *you* believe this?'

'Yes.'

'Ah!' and the little man dropped his eyes again and sat with bowed head, deep in thought.

'But, Miss Shelton. Don't she play tricks with herself? Drink—chloral—or something?'

This terrible charge Vivien denied with the utmost indignation. No doubt could trouble her as to this.

'I give you my word of honour that she doesn't. How can you ask?'

'It is what people say. But I didn't really believe it. No, I didn't believe *that*,' and he sat for a long time looking at the floor in silence.

The music of the band came to them faintly: at this far end of the corridor they seemed to have cut themselves off from the noise and gaiety almost as completely as though they had already gone back to Hawkridge. Now and then a couple sauntered towards them beneath the Chinese lanterns, then turned, strolled back, and disappeared. And now, while Sir John sat brooding over the great problem of his life, a horrible thing happened—a thing horrible to Vivien, who was the only person who saw it.

A couple from the dance came slowly to them, whispering and laughing—Lord Helensburgh and Mrs. Arncliffe. They came to the other side of the last of the lanterns, and looked straight at Vivien and Sir John; but then in a moment the

properties of this sitting-out place became obvious. The sitters-out could not be seen.

After glancing to and fro, Mrs. Arncliffe kissed her escort. Her hand with the fan in it behind her back, the other hand holding the lapel of his red coat, on tip-toe, stretching her neck, putting lips to lips—a long, wicked kiss, given to him without being asked for it, in the most matter-of-fact way. He had held her by the back of her neck, and, as they turned and strolled away, he still held her thus for a few paces before he dropped his hand. It was a horrible picture of the young Sultan with his favourite slave, and behind it Vivien could see another picture: the dying husband creeping on his shortening path, looking at her with his intolerable smile. The wickedness of it all made her heart cold and heavy.

'Look here,' said Sir John, standing up suddenly, 'I am going to pin my faith on you. You couldn't be so cruel as to want to deceive me—even for her sake. Come along, Miss Shelton—I shall never forget your kindness. I believe what you have said is going to make me one of the happiest of men. Yes, I do believe there is nothing in all the talk.'

When they reached the ball-room, Lord Helensburgh was looking for her: number sixteen was nearly over. She excused herself from dancing; she could not have danced with him; it was only by an effort that she could speak to him at all. He accepted her excuses, and asked her to carry a message for him.

'I hope granny isn't riled because I didn't turn up. I am coming over to-morrow night—or next morning at the latest. Will you tell her all that. And will you tell her I only came down this afternoon, and I went to Hacketts because it is so much more convenient for these point-to-point races. I'm going to ride you know, and I sent my horses there—as they kindly said I might—because, don't you see, it is so much better for the horses. Do tell her all that, will you? . . . And oh, I say, when I come over, do give me another game at Old Maid. Good night, if I don't see you again. And I say—put your money on me for the Visitors' Cup. It's a dead cert. I win.'

Then very soon the evening was over and they went home in the big omnibus; and Vivien, sitting silent and weary, was ungrateful to the fairies, and almost wished that they had not sent her to the ball.

'Oh Vivien,' said Lady Augusta. 'You are a brick, you are a trump—and really and truly he said he was desperately in love. Oh Vivien I adore him. I wish you had told him that. But I didn't know it myself—till to-night.'

This was in Lady Augusta's room, and Lady Augusta in a dressing-gown was sitting before the fire, opening and shutting a small leather box that she had brought out of her locked dressing-case.

'And really and truly you think he won't let all those beasts put him off again. . . . He didn't say he meant to speak at once, did he? . . . But he will speak soon. I was sure of it. I knew he had been put off. Oh Vivien I shall sleep to-night—like a top. I 'm so happy,' and she opened her little box. 'I believe I should sleep without this. Good-night. You are just the best pal a girl ever had.'

The weary maid had been dismissed for the night; this was the end of a long talk; and at last Lady Augusta herself seemed to feel that it was time to allow her friend to go to bed. But outside the door a dreadful doubt arrested Vivien, making her pause, and then compelling her to return to the room.

'What—what are you doing?'

Lady Augusta, still sitting by the fire, had got to work with her little box; had filled her little syringe and pulled down the dressing-gown from one big bare shoulder; and was, in the most business-like way, just where the shoulder-strap of her evening-dress would hide any tell-tale mark upon the beautiful smooth surface, on the point of giving herself a hypodermic injection.

'Hallo!' said Lady Augusta. 'You startled me . . . This? Oh, this is only to make me sleep—morphia. Morphine sulphate, you know!'

'Oh how wicked of you!' cried Vivien. 'Oh what a wicked girl you are.'

She was almost breathless from indignation and disgust. The hateful talk had been true then. This wretched girl played tricks with herself. She was one of those lost souls who were written about in the papers, and of whom Miss Brierley and her friends had once talked: hopeless self-indulgent slaves of the fatal drug-habit, whose truth and honesty and moral control were sapped and drained from them by the certain effects of yielding to the odious craving. This was the deadly needle they had spoken of—used at night and in the morning. Here were all the appliances for self-destruction.

Standing over Lady Augusta, she poured forth a stream of righteous indignation.

'Oh you wicked girl to do it. I remember now—those spots on your arm when I brought you the blouse—and you were rude and angry when I spoke about them. Oh how can you? This is why you cry and get out of breath, and are foolish and hysterical . . . I understand it all now.'

And beneath the attack the great culprit cowered and quailed and wept.

'Oh Vivien, don't, don't go on like that.'

'And I told him you didn't do it. He asked me, and I told him on my honour that you didn't. Now, to-morrow morning, I shall tell him the truth. He is a good, honest man, and he believed my word, and I won't lie to him.'

At this threat Lady Augusta, now pale and trembling, fell upon her knees and implored Vivien not to betray her weakness.

'Oh you couldn't, you couldn't do it. You couldn't spoil my life for ever, by telling him. Vivien—look here—I know it's wrong—and Vivien, I swear I'll leave off—I'll never—never—do it again.'

'I can't trust you. I told him a lie—I must tell him so.'

'No, no—Vivien, I swear—I'll take any oath you like. Look here. I swear this is the truth. I had it first for neuralgia—when I couldn't sleep—and I've never increased the dose—a quarter of a grain—not enough to hurt a cat. Not enough to send me to sleep—It hasn't hurt me—But I swear I'll never do it again. You may take the things—to make sure. There's another tube of the tabloids in my bag. I'll give you that. I'll do anything you like—only don't, don't tell him.'

Thus Lady Augusta pleaded for silence and vowed amendment.

'If you say it is so wrong,' she argued, 'and you want to prevent me doing it any more—that is the way: not by telling him. If you tell him and he chucks me, I shall just know my life is spoilt for ever, and I shall have nothing to live for, and I shan't mind what I do with myself or what happens to me.'

It was an argument that told; and in the end, Vivien carried away with her the wicked leather box, the syringe, the two little tubes containing the tabloids, etc., after Lady Augusta had taken a most solemn oath that never again as long as she lived would she play tricks with herself.

'And now,' she said, wiping her eyes. 'Kiss me, Vivien, so that I shall know you trust me, and that you don't mean to change your mind and spoil my life, after all, by telling him.'

Vivien, locking up the hateful appliances in a drawer in her own room, gave much reasoned thought to the case of Lady Augusta, and on the whole, in spite of her first disgust and horror, now took a hopeful view. Really Lady Augusta, though thirty-one years of age, was only an impulsive, very foolish, but affectionate, overgrown child. If she married the good little man,

she would have some one to look after her, and in happiness and content she would drop all bad habits.

Next day the party broke up, the fine company disappeared, Lady Colwyn laid aside her fine company manners, and the great house sank back into silence and dulness. The two young men still remained, and in the evening Lord Helensburgh arrived to act as host: but, so far as Lady Colwyn and her lady-in-waiting were concerned, the festivities were at an end.

In the hour of leave-taking Lady Augusta was effusively affectionate to Vivien; and Mrs. Gardiner was very kind, patting her hand, reminding her that they were to be real friends; but what the Stonehavens said to her was overwhelming.

'It is not often,' said the great Scottish lord, 'that my wife and I are envious, Miss Shelton; but we envy our kind friend her good fortune in having you as her constant guest.'

'Yes,' said Lady Stonehaven. 'You are so good-natured and nice to everybody.'

'Life is uncertain,' said his lordship gravely, 'or I would not say this. If the opportunity should arise, and you have nothing better to do, come to us in our dull old castle and be a companion to my wife. Never, of course, while Lady Colwyn wants you. But do not forget us.'

'We do not change our minds,' said Lady Stonehaven.

'No,' said his lordship. 'Years hence—if God permits—you will find us behind our thick walls unchanged.'

As Mr. Frensham would have said, it was an astonishing compliment.

In the days that followed, Lord Helensburgh was too much occupied as host to his two guests to spare much time for visits to his granny. He came to her room in the daytime—never in the evening—and Vivien was not on duty when he presented himself. She wondered if reproaches had been uttered on the subject of Hacketts. The old lady had heard that message about the horses in stony silence, but who could doubt that the young man's absence had wounded her deeply?

The Hunt races took place on Friday, and in the local paper next day all the world could read a full account of this most interesting meeting. The Visitors' Cup was won by the Earl of Helensburgh's Monsoon, owner up; and this perhaps was not surprising as my lord was riding a Grand National horse. Neither Lord Rotherfield's horse nor Sir John Hartnell's was placed. The former, it appeared, had jumped into a lane and

gone for a gallop down the lane instead of jumping out of the lane; the latter had fallen at the second fence. Whether it got up again and eventually completed the course during the day the newspaper reporter did not relate.

On this Saturday afternoon, a motor-car arriving at Hawkridge was met with closed gates. The gate-keeper regretted that he could not open the gates; her ladyship's orders could not be disobeyed: no motors could on any pretext be admitted. Then Mr. Stanford descended from the obnoxious machine, and, leaving it to snort and rattle outside the gates in charge of the Hacketts chauffeur, walked across the park. Turning from the road after he had passed through the wood, he made his way by the gardens, determined to reach the house by the shortest if not the most ceremonious route, and in the gardens he met Lord Helensburgh and Sir John Hartnell.

'Hullo,' said Lord Helensburgh.

'Hullo,' echoed Mr. Stanford, with a nod of the head and a smile that was rather like a snarl.

Between the two men there was an old-established and very hostile feeling which neither was at great pains to conceal. When they were thrown together—as often happened—each ignored the other almost entirely. They had just been staying in the same house, and while under Lady Laura's hospitable roof, they had not exchanged a dozen words.

'Have you come over with some message for me?' asked Lord Helensburgh.

'No,' said Mr. Stanford. 'I have come over to see a friend.'

'I didn't know you had a friend here—and my grandmother's guests have gone.'

Mr. Stanford was walking on.

'I have come to see Miss Shelton.'

'Oh! Then you have come the wrong way. This is not the way to the house. Turn to your right,' and Lord Helensburgh pointed with his stick, 'and then keep straight on and you will get back to the road.'

'What the devil,' said Lord Helensburgh, rejoining Sir John, 'does that fellow mean by coming here? Confound him! Why the devil should he come to call on Miss Shelton?'

'No,' said Sir John. 'A deuced queer customer to call on any girl. I am quite sure Miss Shelton don't want any of *his* sort of attentions.'

Vivien, waiting for orders, uncertain whether she was to drive to-day or stay at home, was sitting with her employer when Mrs. Mapleton came in to convey the announcement of the visitor.

Lady Colwyn looked round angrily.

'Is it that young doctor again? He comes here too often. You are not ill. You must tell him not to come so frequently.'

'It is not Dr. Quinlan. It is somebody that I do not want to see.'

'Oh won't you see him, miss?' said Mrs. Mapleton. 'And the gentleman come all the way from Hacketts, hasn't he, miss?'

'Who is this person?' asked Lady Colwyn.

'Mr. Stanford, my lady.'

'I was not speaking to you,' said Lady Colwyn, and Mapleton softly withdrew to wait with the servant in the corridor. She had said all that she wanted to say, and could support reproof.

'Miss Shelton, why have you asked this objectionable person to come here?'

'I did not ask him.'

'Stanford—I have heard the name. A most objectionable person. They are all objectionable people at Hacketts. I cannot permit you to see him.'

'I have told you that I have no intention of seeing him,' said Vivien proudly. Then, 'I am very sorry,' she added humbly, 'that he has disturbed you, but really it is not my fault.'

'Then call Mapleton and say so. . . . Mapleton, Miss Shelton will not see this gentleman.'

In a little while Mapleton returned.

'The gentleman has gone, miss, but he left a note for you.'

Vivien sat for a few minutes, with the letter in her hand, thinking. Surely this man was the basest and meanest of his kind. He had come to-day, as he had come to the shop, with the settled intention of doing her all the injury that lay within his power: to put her in ill repute with her employer, to connect her name with his in the minds of all who knew her, to drive her if he could from the strong walls within which she was safe from his pursuit.

'Well,' said Lady Colwyn, 'why don't you open your letter?'

Vivien was so deep in thought that she did not hear the question. Her breath came fast as she thought of the man's cruelty. He had made life impossible for her at Mrs. Wardrop's—it would be too horrible if again he were to rob her of the means of existence.

'Answer me, if you please,' said Lady Colwyn.

'I beg your pardon. What did you ask me?'

'Read the man's letter, and see what explanation he offers for coming here, since you tell me you did not ask him.'

'He can offer me no explanation or apology that I can accept,'

said Vivien very proudly. 'His coming here was simply an impertinence.'

As she spoke, she crossed the room and threw the unopened letter into the fire.

'Oh,' said Lady Colwyn, looking with unblinking eyes at the flame from the burning paper. Then she went on with her knitting, and there was a long silence.

'Miss Shelton!' she said at last, suddenly and fiercely.

'Yes.'

'You did very well. Quite right. That is exactly how I myself would wish to deal with all communications from Hacketts. Order the carriage. We will go for a drive.'

In the evening, going to the room in which she now dined, Vivien met Lord Helensburgh on his way to dinner downstairs with his bachelor guests, and he at once spoke of the visitor. Everybody in the great house, it seemed, had heard of the visit.

'Well, did you see your friend Mr. Stanford?'

'No. He is not a friend of mine.'

'Very glad to hear it. He isn't a friend of mine either. Then rather cheek his calling, wasn't it?'

'Yes,' and she repeated her phrase. 'It was simply an impertinence.'

'Never met him till the dance?'

'Yes. I had met him before,' and as she answered she blushed hotly. Lady Colwyn had a right to question her in such a manner, but not this young man.

'But don't want to meet him again, eh?' and he laughed. As she walked along the corridor he walked by her side. 'Did he tell you he intended to call here?'

'No,' and she hurried away to her solitary dinner.

His questioning had made her hot and indignant and uncomfortable. She was not *his* lady-in-waiting. He had no right to ask her to give an account of her visitors. He was only less wicked than the other, and only a little less impertinent.

XXV

IN the great house the orderly routine of the colourless days had been resumed: the wheel of life revolved on noiseless springs with merciless precision. The empty hours were measured, marked off with enervating accuracy—letters to write, food, the drive, more food, the paper to read, then bed. Nothing came to stir into healthful movement the heavy, nerve-relaxing atmosphere; behind the big doors in the vast unused rooms the spirit of Deadly Dulness sat enthroned, while that other spirit of Sudden Sadness wandered in the stately gardens, stole away to meet one in the woods, to walk with one hand in hand when the sun was setting beyond the far-off marshes.

Now that the May sunlight streamed into the library, and birds sang, and flowers were gay in the borders beneath the window, it was impossible to sit at the old lord's table and read with a purpose. The sunbeams, like some potent chemical testing preparation, dissolved the dry old books into their proper elements—dust and ashes. All Vivien's reading was done now at night, in her own room, when the long meaningless day had come to an end. But here in the daylight, with Mr. Frensham fussily attentive, standing at her elbow as though to observe the enlargement of her mind progressing under his eyes, she could only sit stupidly brooding. What was Sloane Street looking like in the lively May sunlight? Was the shop full or empty? Had Mr. Pritchard brought any complimentary tickets for the theatre lately? As she thought of it, she longed for Sloane Street. Life under Mrs. Wardrop's iron rule had been a sordid slavery, but still it had been life. This was stagnation.

In all the great house there was no one who cared for her—no living soul to whom she might speak with freedom. Mr. Frensham was always kind, but the old librarian was too erratic for solid friendship. There was something confused and unstable in all his thoughts. It surprised her to find that through all his learning—and to her he seemed learned—there ran a thread of inaccuracy, a curious garbling of fact and fable that made him useless as a prop or guide. He was wrong as to dates, as to names, as to the bearing of events: even in his catalogue the titles of the books themselves were often incorrectly entered.

She pined for a real friend.

From the outside world gleams of kindness came now and then—letters that cheered her with the thought that she was not yet quite forgotten. Mrs. Gardiner had written and sent her the current number of her club magazine. Lady Augusta wrote without a single comma, to tell of high hopes, undying gratitude; then with exuberant rapture in the confidence that her love-story would undoubtedly have, ere long, a happy ending. Vivien was to watch a particular column in the *Morning Post* and see what she would see. It was pleasant to think that the troubles of this big child had been smoothed away. Marian wrote to thank her dearest Vi for a present of pounds sent after receiving the first quarter's salary in the official-looking envelope, that had been made up so neatly in the rooms behind the cloister, and despatched to the lady-in-waiting with much ceremony through the department of Mr. Richards, the house steward. Marian would not have taken the money had not her dearest Vi assured her that in Vi's new life pounds were useless counters; but she owned now that the present was a godsend, that it would buy for her some restful evenings, and perhaps some happy days.

Twice Dr. Quinlan had written to her. It was dreadful to think of the pain that she had caused this strong, good man. In return for all his kindness, in payment of the debt of gratitude that he had laid upon her, she had hurt him so sorely that he would suffer from the wound for many years to come. That was what he said with his direct and honest use of words. He did not say 'till death' but 'for many years.' 'Don't think,' he said, with that naïve touch of his untrained pen, 'that I reproach you for leading me on. I know I have only myself to blame. If your feelings should change, if for any reason there should be a chance of your reconsidering your decision, please communicate with me at once. I feel now as though I for my part shall never alter my mind, or ever be able to care for any one else. I beg of you to remember this.' It was truly a horrible thought: she had, in a most inexplicable and totally unforeseen manner, won the love of a true man, and all she could do was—as Lady Augusta would certainly have said—utterly to spoil the man's life.

Dr. James, when by chance she met him, never laughed now. He bowed very coldly and evinced no inclination to foster the acquaintance that had begun so auspiciously. But after the arrival of Dr. Quinlan's second letter he sent a message one morning craving an interview, and she went to him again in the parlour with the long window.

'I hope,' said Dr. James, 'you will forgive me for troubling you, Miss Shelton. Yes, I want, if you will allow me, to say a few words about my nephew—quite on my own account. He has not sent me to you.'

Vivien felt very miserable. Dr. James looked as though in all his long life he had never hunted for a joke and laughed before he had really found it. He regarded her with solemn questioning eyes. His voice and his manner were gravely courteous, but both seemed to convey cold disapproval.

'He is a very good fellow, that nephew of mine, Miss Shelton: as good a fellow as one would meet in a long journey—well, in life's journey one might almost say.'

'I am sure he is.'

'Thank you. But it may be he is a little wanting in *tact*. He has never mixed with the great world, Miss Shelton. He has not the graces, the polish, the taking exterior that I imagine go for so much with young ladies. Too abrupt, I dare say, too downright and straightforward for a courtier. Miss Shelton, every man,' and the old fellow bowed, 'would wish to be a courtier when wooing the woman he loves.'

'I assure you I admire his good qualities very much.'

'Thank you. Miss Shelton, my nephew loves you sincerely, but it occurs to me that he may have been too abrupt—altogether too premature, and that—without your knowing it yourself perhaps—he is suffering from the foolish haste that sprang from his—love,' and with an effort Dr. James avoided the obvious antithesis that the repetition of the adjective would have given him.

'No—it isn't anything like that. I am so sorry but——'

'But Miss Shelton, you may not realise it yourself. If he had been wise he would have allowed time to aid him. Young ladies need time—plenty of time—to make up their minds. The contrast created by new surroundings is naturally stronger than one supposes. Time is needed to pick up broken threads. Miss Shelton, I am sure he was too abrupt. He is not a fool of course. Doubtless he thought you had given him such indications as young ladies usually——'

'I had never thought that he cared for me—never. Oh Dr. James I am more sorry than I can say. It makes me wretched to think that he really cares.'

'What I wanted to ask you,' said Dr. James, 'is this. Don't consider the subject as closed for ever. Don't think of it now, but later on—a year hence—think it all over again—then. My nephew's is a strong, deep nature'; and then, oddly enough, he used Sir John's very words. 'To a man of my nephew's char-

acter this sort of thing is really life or death. That is why I trouble you—why I feel forced to trouble you.'

Every word made her feel more miserable.

'If I might tell my nephew,' said Dr. James, 'that he need not quite despair of influencing you.'

'No. Please don't tell him that.'

'May I tell him as much as this: you promise to think it over—that your final decision will not be given until one year from now? I believe this would do him good at the moment—and in twelve months,' said Dr. James very coldly, 'it is just conceivable that his feeling may be weakened—it is within the bounds of the possible that he may have found somebody else.'

'I am sure he could find a thousand girls better and nicer than I. But please don't tell him that I may change my mind—I feel that I cannot. But I *will* do what you say—I will think it over again and again and again. But I promise that to *you*, not to him.'

Then Dr. James said good-morning, and went stamping away, and the stone passages echoed and re-echoed to his steps.

She thought of it, after this interview, often, as she had promised. She reconsidered her decision: driving homeward with Lady Colwyn when the gates closed behind the carriage and the Spirit of Sadness as an invisible outrider convoyed them through the dusky beech wood; alone on sunlit paths by cottages where women and children came out and curtseyed because, as the Spirit told her, she belonged to the great house and not because they bore her any real good will; and once at evening, sitting hand in hand with the Spirit on a stone bench at the end of the long terrace, she very nearly changed her mind. The sun was setting, the darkening front of the house was like an immense prison wall, the cypresses and yews seemed carved in stone, swathed in crape, and she sat for a few moments spell-bound, shivering, conquered by the invincible melancholy of the hour and of the place.

How empty and how hopeless was her future! As yet she had but dreamed, and already her life was fading into vagueness. What would become of her, what in the name of reasoned thought had she to hope for? From her who had so little, each year had taken something—the few who had loved her: mamma, Maitey, Marian; the few who had perhaps taken some faint interest in her welfare: school-fellows, shop-mates, Clara, Mrs. Kearsley. Each year would still take something: by death, by new ties, by forgetfulness they would all go from her. Soon the years would take them all, would leave her utterly alone, shivering and miserable: youth gone, hope gone, strength gone

—a useless wanderer in the dream-grotto, sinking down unseen among the grey shadows that hide the grotto's wall.

But as this man's wife—and she shivered as she thought of it—she would be safe from total oblivion. She would have work to do—real work at last: helping him on the good road, ministering to the lamp of his honest ambition, being really useful to him and to his poor patients, forgetting herself, losing this weak repining dreaming self for ever among the solid facts of life. And if she could not love him, at least he would be a true, staunch friend—the unwavering friend for whom she pined in her almost intolerable loneliness. That night she very, very nearly decided to write to Dr. Quinlan with the good news that on reconsideration she had finally made up her mind not to spoil his life.

But next day, quite by accident, she found the friend she had been pining for, and Dr. Quinlan's chance was gone.

There was no drive this afternoon, and she had walked far and was returning to the beech woods on the borders of the park when she met him. A little way back she had passed a row of Lady Colwyn's model cottages, where a red-haired man was digging in a garden and a woman in one of the doorways was singing to a child; but down here, on the old pilgrims' path through the wood, there was not a soul in sight. He was standing at a little distance from the track, and as she passed he looked at her attentively. Then, as though struck by her appearance, he began to follow her through the lonely wood.

When she slackened her pace, he stopped and waited. When she went on, he followed her again. He did not speak to her, but he was following her, openly, persistently. She was not in the least frightened, but of course understood what he was doing, and at last she turned and accosted him. Without answering he slunk away amid the bushes, and she walked on alone, slowly and thoughtfully. But suddenly he reappeared. Hidden by the thick undergrowth he had made a half circle to cut her off, and now he stood before her, a dozen yards ahead, in the middle of the path. She paused and spoke to him again—very gently, with extraordinary tenderness in her voice.

'Oh what is it that you want? Are you in trouble? My poor fellow, how can I help you? What is it that you want me to do?'

At the sound of her voice, he lay down quite flat on his chest—still eying her—with his head on the ground and his tail wagging.

He was very shy to her hand, but at last he allowed her to

pat him. 'Oh how can you think I would hurt you?' she said, advancing slowly. 'I tell you, you can trust me. If you are really lost, I promise to try and find your home.'

Then he slowly rolled over on his back with his four legs in the air—looking up at her with half-closed, upside-down eyes, trembling, but immovable until she put him on his legs again. He was a fox-terrier, she surmised, and at once he showed her the droll side of a fox-terrier's character: racing round her in circles, tail tucked in, ears back, diving off the path into the bushes, crossing the path at lightning speed, in front of her, behind her, going round and round her, until he made her giddy. Then he jogged on ahead with absurd sedateness. He would not follow her when she turned to go back. He would only go one way, and that was the way to the great house.

He followed her, coming close to her heels as she walked under the archway into the quadrangle of the stables. Here some helpers summoned a superior sort of groom, but the groom, touching his hat very respectfully, explained that he was powerless to assist her. He could not offer so much as half an hour's hospitality to her charge; she must see Mr. Slade himself; and the groom rang an electric bell inside a door, and asked an unseen personage to request Mr. Slade to step down.

The big coachman that she knew well on his box seat was most splendid when seen thus in his hours of leisure. He was dressed in black—black satin tie, pearl pin, low, broad-brimmed hat, superbly polished boots—a heavy and a stately man like a member of parliament for some northern town, or a consulting physician from Bath or Harrogate.

'A stray from the cottages!' said Mr. Slade, when Vivien had described how and where she had met her companion. 'They all keep dogs up there—and most of them for no good, miss. Though he don't look up to poaching much—No collar, of course,' and Mr. Slade glanced at the dog with anything but admiration.

'He is a fox-terrier, isn't he?'

'Well miss, I suppose you would have to call him a fox-terrier.'

'Isn't he a well-bred dog?'

'No miss, he don't show no sort of points at all. That's where he came from—those cottages. Been after the rabbits and lost himself. Well what can I do, miss? Send one of my chaps to take him back?'

'No. I'll go myself. Please put him somewhere safe in the stable, and give him some food. He looks hungry.'

Mr. Slade became very grave.

'You know her ladyship's rules, miss. No dogs allowed.' And he explained that this edict had run for many years. Not even the gate-keepers were permitted a useful dog to bark a warning or frighten tramps.

'Of course,' said Mr. Slade, with the grand manner of the important servant addressing one of the ruling caste, 'I'll do it on your order. But you'll bear me out with her ladyship if trouble comes. You gave me the order to put him in for an hour or so. . . . Here, get me some string.'

Vivien, as a theoretical member of the family, promised to exonerate Mr. Slade from blame; saw her friend led away with his short tail between his legs; and then hastened back across the park once more.

At the cottages the red-haired man was still busy in his garden. He leaned on his spade and listened in glum silence while she asked him questions. He was a big, earth-stained, middle-aged man, a true child of this southern soil, slow of movement, and slow of speech when at last he spoke. With his broad surly face surrounded by fierce red hair, and his gruff slow voice he soon made Vivien tremble—he looked exactly like the ogre in an illustrated *Grimm's Goblins*. He was the owner of the dog.

'Wouldn't lat I catch un yezterday marnin. I tried to catch un.'

'What for?'

'To break his back.'

Oh, horror!

'He stole my bacon yezterday marnin.'

'Poor little beast. He knows no better.'

'But I knows better than to give un another chance. He beant no good,' he added with a grunt. 'Never catched so much as a mouse.'

'May I buy him?'

'Buy un? No,' said the man, and Vivien trembled.

'You mean you want me to bring him back?'

'If 'ee do, miss. I'll break his back for un.'

'Then I certainly shan't. I'll give you two shillings.'

The man thought before he answered slowly.

'That wud'nt be fair. 'E beant worth nothing. Come to skin un, what can ee do with un? Tain't like a good lurcher—make a weskit for a man. . . . Ee can aave un if ee wants un,' and he went on digging.

But then the wife came out, curious, curtseying, wiping her hands, and the man without looking up explained: 'Wants to buy my dog—not fair,' etc.

No—but the wife looked troubled and anxious. Two shillings going begging; but 'No, fair's fair,' she said sadly. Then, taking her line, she pleaded for Vivien's good word at the great house, intercession with the great lady—the old inherited cry of the peasant for countenance and protection.

'Will you,' said Vivien to the man, offering the two shillings, 'accept this as a present?'

'I tell ee, I wunt,' said the man angrily. 'And don't ee bring 'un up my way.'

She flew back, down the hill, through the woods—trembling still whenever she thought of the red-haired man. Mr. Slade had tied the visitor to the iron manger of an empty loose box with a long string and an improvised collar made of an old strap pierced by his own penknife; and a well-cleaned platter showed that the visitor had been given some sort of meal.

'You are rather an imp,' she said when the groom had left them alone; and she knelt beside her friend. 'You are rather an imp to rob a poor man of his breakfast. So that is what I mean to call you—Imp. Do you understand? That is your name—Imp.'

Then for the first time the dog talked to her. First he licked her hands; then he licked her face; then, with his eyes, he began to whisper.

'How long have you been?' he whispered. 'Not long, I suppose. But I have missed you. They haven't missed you in the house, but *I* missed you. I ate the food to kill time, but I didn't enjoy it because *you* weren't there.'

Then in a moment there came into his eyes a wonderful look—solemn, wistful, inconceivably pathetic; and this is what he said:

'I trust you now. You'll not betray me?'

'Oh my darling,' she said, kneeling by his side. 'My darling, I'll never betray you,' and she burst into tears.

'There, there,' said the dog, wagging his tail. 'Don't make a fuss. I *had* to ask you. Now I am happy. Don't worry about me. I'm all right now.'

And when, after bidding him good-night, she came softly back to peep at him through the barred door of the loose box, he had curled himself up in the straw, with his nose near his tail, and was almost asleep already.

All these adventures had occupied hours and she was in fear lest the evening toilet might have begun when, flushed, excited, in eager haste, she burst in upon Lady Colwyn.

'That,' said Lady Colwyn, 'is not the way to enter a room.'

'I know. I am very sorry. But I have so much to tell you.

I can't think of anything till I have obtained your permission. I know you won't refuse when you hear—'

'What are you talking about—in this foolish, unbecoming manner?'

Eagerly she told how she had become possessed of her dog.

'I may keep him, mayn't I?'

'No.'

'Oh why not? What harm can he possibly do?'

'Sooner or later he would want to come into the house. Say no more. He must be removed at once.'

'I do think you are unkind.'

'You may think what you like.

'Oh you don't know the circumstances'; and, like a child telling a tale of ogres and sprites, she related the history of the afternoon: the poor forlorn little imp that would rather starve than return to the home that had become a slaughter-house, the cruel, appalling cottager—but honest, very honest, a good fellow with a nice wife; yet, from defective education and so on, an ogre where dogs were concerned.

But all these details left Lady Colwyn very cold. Not even a gentleman's dog—a mongrel.

'Then,' said Vivien, 'as a great favour to me: May he stay in your stables to-night—for this one night? Please allow that.'

'It would be wiser of you—more becoming to refrain from asking such a favour—to send the dog away at once.'

'But there are no trains. I mean there is no time for me to pack before the last train. It will be more convenient to go away in the morning.'

'You will go away in the morning?'

'Of course I shall. Do you suppose—'

'Leave the room—Girl.'

Quite late that night she was summoned to the great lady's presence.

'Are you packed?'

'Yes.'

'Sit down there, where I can see your face. Now I am going to talk to you very seriously, and you will be good enough to listen without interruption'—with a raised hand Lady Colwyn checked incipient disobedience to this direction. 'Remember, I am old. I will say nothing of any other reasons why I should be heard with deference. . . .

'Now I understand that when you came to me you were practically starving. Here'—and she looked round with

splendid pride—'you have a roof to shelter you, fire to warm you, food to put in your belly. Have you thought what you risk in leaving all this—have you ever thought of what happens to lonely, homeless girls?'

'Yes, I have thought it all out.'

'And you mean to go?'

'Yes.'

'Risk all this—starvation, death, or infamy for a cur dog?'

'I don't think the pedigree of the dog has anything to do with it.'

'No. Only in adding a touch of the ridiculous to your tragedy.'

'I am certainly not afraid of the ridicule.'

'Is that your last word?'

'Yes.'

'Then you must keep your cur. Arrange it with Slade. Don't let me be bothered—'

'I won't. I promise I won't. You shall never see him. Oh, Lady Colwyn, how can I thank you?'—

'Do not thank me. It is not convenient to me to part with you—that is my only reason'; and again the hand was raised to check any further words. 'Go and get your things unpacked—and never let me hear of your dog again.'

Lady Colwyn, alone by the fireside, sat thinking for nearly a quarter of an hour before she rang the bell for Mapleton and her attendants.

Who were these Sheltons? How had there come to this shop-girl waif a spirit that even Lady Colwyn of Hawkridge could not shake? Here was different fibre, rarer material than in the common stuff from which her bending, crouching, quailing MacNamaras, Lanes, etc., had been made. The great Scotch marquis had been conscious of the difference. As prince speaking to prince, he had congratulated Lady Colwyn upon the possession of this new dependent, had extolled the insight and the power of selection that had enabled Lady Colwyn to provide herself with a worthy figure for the presence chamber. Of all the long line, this tall, pale, defiant girl had shown herself the best of the ladies-in-waiting. As though instinctively, she had fallen into the proper space that the post of lady-in-waiting should occupy—the narrow ground between servant and friend. Mapleton hated her. That was to the credit of the girl. She was the first of all the companions who had understood that friendship between lady-in-waiting and tiring-woman was a derogation from true palace-law. No, she would not part with the girl lightly.

But whence and how had it come—this glimmer of the old-world strength—to a serving girl in a London shop? It was there—showing itself faintly at first, and stronger and stronger when from beneath pent-house brows you watched for it? The great Scottish prince had seen it in an hour. A flash, sometimes, of the inspiration that could only be transmitted from dead men who had thought thus hundreds of years ago. The Hacketts letter burnt unread! 'I can accept no explanation of what is simply an impertinence.' And that other letter! 'Please do not send it.' Why? 'Because it is beneath your dignity!' That was well said and truly. This was good value for outlay —something more than one could buy from MacNamaras for thirty pounds a year. She would not part with the girl unless the girl gave real trouble.

XXVI

IT was winter again. Nearly a year had gone with the swiftness of monotony; and in all these gliding months Vivien had been happy—with her dog. He reconciled her to life; filled the vacant hours with his absorbing society; consoled her, cheered her, acted as connecting link between herself and others. The great Mr. Slade, made known to her by the dog, proved a firm friend. He was always glad to see her in his stables; with his own hands he would often loose the small prisoner and send him scampering to her whistle, for the great event of the day, her dog-walk; and once, when the dog was ailing, his sympathetic care of the patient and his kind words to the owner won her heart completely. A good, grand coachman was Mr. Slade, when you came to know him thus, off his box, in his hours of leisure.

Wet or fine she walked with her dog: in all directions, except past the cottages where lived the red-haired man. Neither Vivien nor the dog ever wanted to go that way.

'I leave the matter in your hands,' he seemed to say, 'but I think you are acting tactfully.'

Abroad and at home he found her friends, made informal introductions to strangers—school children who stopped to talk to him; labourers sitting on banks, munching their dinners, whom he watched with an intentness that no whistling could disturb; farmers' wives, whose skirts he playfully worried; village shopkeepers, into whose shops he hurried the shop cat. It was astonishing how kind every one really was. Vivien was always apologising and always making new friends.

At the house he brought to her notice among the servants a humble little housemaid whom she would never have discovered for herself. This Ellen, a pretty, delicate-looking girl, met the dog in one of the lofty corridors. He had openly and boldly ascended the grand staircase, and was now advancing with unerring instinct and fatal resolution towards the apartments of Lady Colwyn. The girl had the presence of mind to seize him and frustrate his scheme for a personal interview with the great lady, and Vivien was naturally grateful. When, a little

later, the girl was ill, she sent a message begging that the lady-in-waiting would go and see her. Vivien found her with a bad cold: kept in bed by the orders of Dr. James and Mrs. Garnet, the housekeeper; and complaining that of all the servants not one seemed to care whether she died or recovered. Vivien told the poor girl that she was certainly not likely to die; sat with her often; read to her; and, as Ellen gratefully declared, did her much more good than Dr. James. When the little housemaid was well again, Vivien used to find in her room nosegays of woodland flowers that had been gathered by the convalescent during afternoon rambles and stealthily deposited as evidence of gratitude and respect. Thus the dog was always acting as link.

In this quiet, contented time many things had happened in the outer world.

Lady Augusta was married to Sir John Hartnell; Clara was about to be married to Mr. Pritchard of Brent and Cooper's; the blouse shop had been handed over to a company, and Mrs. Wardrop, after acting for three months as manager, had now gone. Marian had gone also and was working in a newly-started mantle shop.

All the world was moving, changing; but here in the great house, whence the Spirit of Sadness had fled—chased away by the dog Imp—Vivien stood firm: a slender shaft that mining could not bring down. Unconscious of plots, careless of danger, she ignored her implacable enemy, Mapleton.

Mapleton, talking to Mrs. Roberts, had duly related how the old box had been brought out, packed, and then unpacked and taken back again, to the place where it stood as a disgrace among all the trunks and portmanteaus of the establishment.

'I thought we *had* seen the last of her,' said Mapleton. 'But give me time and I 'll be even with her.'

'I regard her,' said Mrs. Roberts, 'as a very great danger from which Lady Colwyn should be ridded at the earliest moment.'

One morning very early, Ellen the little housemaid came to Vivien's room with a telegram. The great house was scarcely astir, she explained. The upper maids were not yet down; only the lower grades were at work; and thinking that Miss Shelton ought to have the telegram without delay, she had ventured to bring it herself. The post would not arrive for an hour, and Ellen thought this telegram must really be of importance.

Vivien began to tremble as she read the first two words of the message.

'Your father here very ill. Better come. Huntley, 11 Vincent Grove—Fulham Road, S.W.'

It was an unknown name, an unknown address, and the message had been handed in on the previous night. Papa was ill, dying perhaps, and had sent for her; and already she might be too late.

The first train for London left in about an hour and a half, and by this she travelled. But for the assistance of the little maid, she could never have caught the train. She could not have dressed herself. Her hands shook so violently that the scrawled note which she left for Lady Colwyn was almost illegible. Two telegrams the maid wrote for her—one to Dr. Quinlan and one to the unknown Huntley. Mr. Slade himself drove her to the station, in a dogcart with one of his fleetest horses. She stopped at the village post-office to despatch the telegrams, and Mr. Slade advised her to inquire if any other telegram had arrived for her; but there was no further message from Huntley.

In the train she sat shivering: almost numbed with dread, for a time unable to think, only able to pray that Dr. Quinlan would meet her at the London terminus. She had thought of him in her distress at once. He was the only person in the wide world to whom she could turn for aid. If the telegram reached him she was sure that he would come. But he might be away, at the hospital, by another sick-bed.

For a long time a dreadful cowardly sort of terror held her. It was fear, not grief, that made her hands shake and her heart beat. There lay before her an appalling ordeal. She could not face it quite alone. From the moment that she had been roused from her sleep to read the message, vague, nameless fear had been the dominant feeling in her mind. Horror, towering as a dark, cloaked figure, had claimed this day as its own. The flying landscape, the cold morning light, the rushing train had been given into the keeping of the dream-guardians: the dusky veils of the hooded form were spread over all things, blotting out, obliterating, smothering sunlight and life.

Then, gradually, as she neared her goal, some power to think returned. Two or three times in the last year she had heard from her father, and of late he had said nothing about failing health. She had written to him at least half a dozen times, and had sent her last letter only a week ago. There had been no answer to this last letter. He was already ill, no doubt, when he received it, and now he was dying. She was certain that

she would not have been summoned unless he were on the point of death. Evidently he had changed his lodgings, left Mrs. Page at last. Huntley must be his new landlady, or his doctor.

For a little while the vague terror left her, giving place to grief—an overpowering sadness, an infinite yearning sorrow. She thought now of the man himself, and, as she thought, she saw him, frail and white and very old; and then, by flashes of memory, with extraordinary clearness as he used to be in the far-off days, dark, strong and stern, yet with the gleam of mirth rising now and then from the gloomy depths—source of laughter and of tears. Poor papa!

But the horror of this morning journey came back again with irresistible force as they reached the outskirts of the labyrinth. They were flitting through stations with many platforms, crowded now by the black-coated army of suburban toilers. Then there was a long wait at the station where tickets were taken; and then, in a gathering darkness of mist and smoke, the train crept slowly on to the terminus.

Dr. Quinlan was there, seeking her amidst the black crowd beneath the dingy glass roof, then holding her shaking hand, very slowly and gravely reading the telegram and noting the address. Then in silence they were driving in a cab through the foggy streets that she remembered, through byways of the horrible labyrinth, out into that horrible broad road that led to Vincent Grove.

It was a quiet, decent-looking street—each house with a large porch, beneath which steps rose to the front door—a better street than Berkeley Street. A hansom cab was waiting at one of the houses; from the bottom of the street came the lively music of a piano organ; the door of Number eleven had been recently painted an apple-green colour; there was an electric bell—yellow silk blinds in the windows, the number on the glass above the door conspicuously displayed and newly gilt. These were outward signs of a condition superior to that of Mrs. Page.

In the hall there were odours of cooking, and odours of stale perfumes; the air was close and stifling; through an open door two women were visible. They were dressed in slatternly peignoirs; one had flaxen hair tumbling about her sallow cheeks; both came to the open door, and stood watching and listening while the middle-aged landlady talked volubly to Dr. Quinlan.

'Oh, the young lady's come—oh dear, oh dear! Best bring

her upstairs—poor dear gentleman! The doctor'll be 'ere directly—Dr. Purden. 'E's been in attendance all the time—We found the young lady's letter in the gentleman's pocket,' and then the landlady, putting her hand before her mouth, whispered something in Dr. Quinlan's ear.

The woman with the flaxen hair went back into the room as Vivien passed, and suddenly began to sob.

Upstairs, the front room was furnished with tawdry pomp: satin-covered chairs and sofa, a piano in a black and gold case festooned with gay ribbons, a gaudy wall-paper, and photo-gravures in ebony frames. Large folding doors that must open into the back room, closed; and behind the closed doors, silence.

'Now,' said the landlady, 'let me bring the young lady a whisky and soda. She must want something to support her.'

Then, on a sign from Dr. Quinlan, the landlady withdrew. From the room below came the sound of the woman sobbing hysterically, and the voice of the other woman consoling or complaining.

With his arm about her, holding her by the window, Dr. Quinlan told Vivien that her father was dead. She must be brave; she must wait here for a little while; it would be necessary for him to see this doctor; he must leave her now at once for a few minutes, then he would come back to her.

Presently he was holding her again, speaking in a low voice that seemed to come from an immense distance.

'Would you like to see him?'

A half-lit room behind the folding doors, seen as if through curtains of gauze, then suddenly everything clear, sharply defined: in one moment each trivial detail stamping itself on her memory for ever. Mahogany wardrobe with looking-glass panels; circular stand from which were hanging women's dresses and a lace-flounced petticoat, soiled with mud; dressing-table with silver brushes, ivory powder boxes, a great flacon of the reeking, nauseating perfume; an engraving—above the brass bedstead—two women, stript to the waist, fighting with swords; and beneath this picture—the dead face, the closed eyes, one waxen hand.

No grief, only horror, as she sat by the window again in the front room—sense, thought, frozen—only a dumb longing to be gone, to hear no more Dr. Quinlan and the landlady talking together at the top of the stairs, the sobs of the woman downstairs, the faint waltz music of the organ in the street—a shivering, voiceless prayer for escape before the horror drove her mad.

Dr. Quinlan, dealing sharply and sternly with the landlady, had aroused anger and noisy self-assertion.

'Nothing at all, I tell you, but 'is watch—We 'aint thieves—Don't I tell you Dr. Purden been in attendance. . . . He come 'ome with Emily a week ago and never been out of bed sence. There's 'is clothes of course—we ain't swallered 'em.'

Then, when Dr. Quinlan became more and more stern, there was change of tone—whimpering expostulation and appeals.

'Emily, pore girl, 'as been upset you can see for yourself. She's been crying ever sence. Pore girl—who wouldn't be upset with sich a dreadful thing 'appening? Ain't I shown I 've got me feelings as well as other people? There was no call for me to telegrarf to the young lady if I 'd done anything to be ashamed of myself. No one wants a fuss and no one can say I 'aven't done the right thing in telegrarfing to the young lady.'

Thus the talking continued on the landing outside the silent room, until Dr. Purden drove up to the house in a smart ralli cart. He was young and debonair, fashionably dressed, with an orchid in his button-hole, wearing a shiny silk hat which he did not remove until he came into the room and saw Vivien sitting by the window.

He talked to Dr. Quinlan behind the folding doors and again on the landing, in broken, jerky sentences, with lowered voice and firm intonation.

'Exhaustion—of course—Heart worn out—Then recurrent syncope—all U P from the first. . . . Consultation? No—My partner saw him on Monday night. . . . Inquest? Good Lord, no—I'll go with you to the registrar, if you like. . . . Oh yes, remove at once.'

Then came such words as certificate, mortuary, undertakers, repeated by both men again and again.

'Well, I'll go round there at once. Very sad—Very painful for your friend. But he was old of course—can't go on for ever —Good-morning.'

And the smart young doctor drove away in his smart cart.

Then the horrible day went on, hour after hour, with dream-like vagueness. It was still early. There were people finishing late breakfasts in the hotel where Dr. Quinlan forced her to drink some hot coffee and eat some dry toast at a table close to the fire. Then they were driving about the foggy streets again while Dr. Quinlan transacted the ghastly business of the occasion: a visit to the undertakers, where she waited for a long time in the cab, outside the gloomy shop front with its specimen hatchment and specimen wreath of immortelles and the brass plates waiting to be engraved for coffin-lids; a visit to

the chemist's; a visit to the registrar—a mean little house with an area, at the bottom of which children were playing merrily. Here, in the registrar's front parlour, she was asked a few questions which Dr. Quinlan helped her to answer; then she was invited to sign her name; then they were free to go away again.

'Now,' said Dr. Quinlan, 'I want you to tell me if your poor father had any solicitors who looked after his affairs—Do you remember his ever speaking of his solicitors?'

'Clifford, Atkinson and George—in Lincoln's Inn Fields.'

'Then I think we should go to them. I will see them. You need not see anybody. We shall soon be able to go home now.'

Then a long drive through the busy streets, from which the fog was slowly lifting, and again she was waiting in the cab.

'That's all right,' said Dr. Quinlan, driving away with her once more. 'They will do everything that may be necessary. I saw Mr. Clifford. He asked me to express his sympathy. Now I am going to take you back to Hawkridge.'

Dr. Quinlan was very kind to her throughout this day of horror. But he tortured her at the big station hotel by making her eat again, or pretend to eat. He himself ate with a hearty appetite, apologising for doing so, begging her to understand that, by the iron laws of nature, we must eat even when we grieve most. He was grieving for her very sincerely. He begged her to believe that. He sent some telegrams before the train started, and at Hawkridge a brougham from the great house was waiting for her.

'Now,' said Dr. Quinlan, 'you must stay in your room. Don't see Lady Colwyn or anybody. Don't think of anything. This has been a great shock. Go to bed as soon as possible. Take a book if you like and read in bed,' and he gave her a small medicine bottle. 'Drink this in some water, just before you go to bed. My Uncle James is coming to see you in the morning.'

Then Dr. Quinlan squeezed her hand and bade her good-bye, and stood watching the carriage as long as it remained in sight.

They were all kind to her in this time of bereavement. Lady Colwyn released her from duty. Mr. Clifford wrote to her very kindly. He would attend to everything. Her father, it appeared, had died intestate and it would be necessary for her to apply for letters of administration. There would be a bond, and an affidavit with regard to valuations which must be sworn to by her; and for this purpose it would perhaps be well for her to call at the office in Lincoln's Inn Fields after the funeral.

Dr. James, waiting upon her of a morning, feeling pulse and taking temperature, smiled upon her once more and made poor little jokes to cheer her as he praised the strength of her constitution and advised her to go for some gentle walks. Mr Slade at the stables was waiting to receive her when she visited her dog, and to assure her that he himself would give the dog daily exercise if it were inconvenient to her to attend to such matters just now. When she went to London for the funeral, she carried with her a beautiful wreath, made up by Mr. Ferguson, and presented to her under the great porch with his own hands.

She and Dr. Quinlan were the only mourners, and he also had provided himself with a wreath. He met her again at the London terminus and took her to the undertaker's, in the Fulham Road, where the hearse and the single mourning coach were in readiness to start on their journey. It was a glorious day: a soft west wind blowing, the sun shining as though the spring had already come. For a little way after leaving the undertaker's shop they went slowly; the two seedy men in black walking, one on each side of the hearse; people on the pavement stopping to stare; people in an omnibus peering in upon her, the conductor solemnly holding his hat in his hand and remaining bareheaded until he disappeared. Then, after turning into a side street, they stopped. One of the shabby mutes clambered on to the box seat of the hearse; the other mounted upon the coach; and hearse and coach bowled away at a swinging trot. It was a long journey, Dr. Quinlan explained—impossible to go at a footpace all the way. The cemetery was somewhere near Sydenham. The solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields had made the arrangement, and he had concurred without troubling her. He had assumed that she would have no preference for any particular cemetery. This one was, he understood, in a pleasant, airy situation. When they drew near the cemetery they would go slowly again. It was a lovely day and she must be brave. The perfume of the flowers she had brought from Hawkridge was very fragrant. It was wonderful that such flowers could be grown in England at this season of the year. If only Dr. Quinlan could have added to his great kindness the priceless gift of silence!

It seemed a strange chance that she should drive thus through scenes indissolubly associated in her memory with her father. They rattled down streets she knew well, that led towards the river, down one street parallel to and close behind that in which stood Mrs. Page's house; then out on to the embankment where she had walked with him; by the place where they had

waited for the steamer on just such a cold, bright day as this; then across the sun-lit river, past Battersea Park, into miserable slums, in darkness below railway bridges, through a part of the great town that she had never seen before.

In this long drive, all the past—the far-off days most clearly of all—came back to her with an infinite sadness that slowly swept from her mind the horror that hitherto had oppressed her. The infinite overpowering sadness of life slowly destroyed all thought of the ugliness of life, of the hideousness of death. She wept now, and the tears washed away the last trace of the horror from her mind. He had been nothing to her really, this dead man—a phantom, a shadow; and yet she had loved him. Always there had been pain in the thought of him. All her traffic with him had been but this: a few kind words bought with many tears. And yet now she could think of him at last, as the horror left her, with tenderness, with unreasoning sorrow, with insane regret. Her mother had loved him, had forgiven him always. Who was she that she should sit in judgment and condemn? Poor papa!

As she stood sobbing at the grave-side, she looked across a sea of house-tops to a green hill and the glass towers of the Crystal Palace glittering faintly in the sunlight. It was the view she had looked at as a child from Aunt Burnett's drawing-room window when the dead man had shuffled her off his hands after a day's kindness. The west wind, blowing freely over this higher ground, made the long, rank grass among the graves bow down in little rippling waves; the two mutes held their draped hats close to their heads, shielding themselves as much as might be possible without disrespect to 'this our brother'; one of the bare-armed grave-diggers drew his jacket about his shoulders, looping the earth-stained sleeves; the clergyman spoke the words with a practised glibness, while his surplice flapped and floated in the breeze—'As soon as Thou scatterest them, they are even as a sleep: and fade away suddenly as the grass.'

And Vivien, as the crumbling mould fell from the priestly hand and rattled with a drum-like sound upon the coffin lid, was torn with a sudden unreasoning agony of grief, as intense as though all this had happened years ago and she had been a little child.

A week after the funeral, she made another journey to London. Messrs. Clifford, Atkinson and George—that highly respectable and old-fashioned firm of solicitors—had summoned her to an interview in which they undertook to close the last

chapter in the life-volume of the late Colonel Shelton. She had written to them explaining how Dr. Quinlan had come to her assistance in the hour of trouble, and urging that their first care should be to reimburse him for outlay that he had probably incurred on her behalf. She hoped that there would be neither difficulty nor delay as to this. Now, sitting in Mr. Clifford's room at the office in Lincoln's Inn Fields, she was reassured.

'Oh yes,' said Mr. Clifford. 'We have attended to that—A kind, good fellow—your friend Dr. Quinlan. A very estimable young man I feel sure. . . . Am I right in conjecturing that he will be something more than a friend before long?'

'No. He will never be more than a friend.'

'Ah well. I should have been glad to think—But now, my dear Miss Shelton, we must talk over this sad business—this very sad business.'

And Mr. Clifford rang a bell, and told the clerk who answered it to bring him certain papers. There were already many documents spread out upon the table, and the old solicitor had been going through them before his visitor arrived. He was the senior partner—a tall, lean man, grey-haired and urbane, with business-like manner, but kind voice. In the office it was held that great honour was done to any client who was received by Mr. Clifford.

'I have attended to this matter myself,' said Mr. Clifford. 'And I regret—'

The clerk came back with two or three packets of papers, and Mr. Clifford waited until he had gone again.

'I regret that the state of affairs disclosed is most unsatisfactory. I fear, I very much fear that any natural expectations you may have had—'

'I expected nothing. I always knew that my father was very poor.'

'But if he was ever poor it was entirely his own fault, Miss Shelton. Your father had muddled away considerable—well, very sufficient means, you know, in the course of his life.'

Then Mr. Clifford made an apology for abandoning reserve.

'You must forgive me if I seem to speak unkindly, Miss Shelton. I assure you that I harbour no resentment for any trouble your father gave us—and I may tell you that at one time and another he did give us an immense amount of trouble. We men of business are obliged to use the plainest words—if I mention that there is a very considerable indebtedness to our firm which, in these sad circumstances, we freely wipe out with a stroke of the pen—I only do mention it to show you that I am not unfeeling or unsympathetic.'

Then Mr. Clifford, glancing at his memoranda, slowly and in the most business-like manner, explained that the late Colonel Shelton had for very many years thought of nobody but himself. There had been no life assurance, no investments except small purchases of speculative—ridiculous shares: a gambler's foolish effort now and then to grow rich by a happy fluke. There were debts: accounts unpaid, ignored, wherever it had been possible to obtain credit; a crowd of humble creditors—small tradesmen, lodging-house keepers, and disreputable acquaintances. In a word, their late client had left behind him nothing but confusion and disgrace. There was, however, a fairly important balance at his bank, and with this, after realising the personal effects, and so forth, Mr. Clifford hoped that they might be able to clear off the debts. But, when this had been done, it was obvious that absolutely nothing would remain.

'And now about this legacy from those Greenwich people—your cousins, the Carters? Yes, here it is—all this money that your father came into in the year eighty-eight. You know about that of course?' said Mr. Clifford sharply, as he met Vivien's look of wonder.

'I suppose I knew all about it at the time. It is so long ago.'

'Well what I want you to tell me is this. We made very strong representations to your father that, as this money came to him from his wife's family, it was clearly his duty to make provision therewith for you, her daughter. I hope that some such provision was made.'

'No.'

'You were then almost a child—at school. Are you sure that some settlement was not made for your benefit—some trust fund created? You know, your father may have drawn the income as you were a child—and may have continued to do so.'

'No, I am sure that—that this was not done.'

'He gave us his word of honour—he wrote to us that he was on the point of completing an arrangement. This was just at the time when we ceased altogether to act for your father. But I am afraid that you are right—I fear that you are quite right—that nothing was ever done—that your father had no real intention of doing anything,' and Mr. Clifford shrugged his shoulders and frowned.

'Well, then, Miss Shelton, I must really say that your father's conduct was unworthy—most unworthy. There can be no doubt now that your father squandered or muddled away a large part of this very substantial windfall, and with the remainder—some eight thousand pounds—purchased an annuity. I am very sorry. You have been treated with great injustice.'

Thus Mr. Clifford turned the last page in her father's life-history.

'One other thing I must mention, Miss Shelton—a quantity of papers—of merely sentimental value unfortunately—family records and so forth, relating to your mother's people—which you can take away or we will hold to your order—as you choose? . . . I will have them made into a parcel at once—shall I? . . . These came to us on the death of the late Mr. Henry Carter, and we always declined to hand them over to your father—until he should settle our outstanding account—which, as I say, we readily wipe out now with a stroke of the pen. We shall not have to trouble you to come here again. Such documents as you may be called on to sign shall be despatched to you at—er—Hawkridge. The final statements, accounts, will be sent to you in due course. Our charges will be trifling, and of course will come out of the estate.'

Then, with the neatly packed bundle of papers—her share in the windfall of which she had never until to-day heard—she went back to Hawkridge. She bestowed her sealed packet in a drawer in her splendid room. She had no curiosity to open it and examine the contents: to realise that sentimental value spoken of by the solicitor. What did it matter how much money these unknown cousins had left to the dead man? She had no wish to read the schedule of the property he had squandered, or trace to their source those purchased pounds that used to fill his golden purse.

XXVII

AMONG the many people who, while her loss was still recent, tried to give evidence of sympathy by little acts of kindness was he who had once been her dream-prince.

My lord, after a long period of neglect, had come to see his granny again. Once more, it seemed, he had committed the almost unpardonable sin of going to stay at Hacketts. The objectionable Lady Laura had been entertaining a select house-party. Before Mrs. Mapleton had learnt the news by back-stairs gossip, the announcement that Lord Helensburgh was included in the party had appeared in a London newspaper. Now, the young man had left the hateful house and come over to Hawkridge.

'I say, Miss Shelton, granny's not going for her drive this afternoon I hear. Where are you off to?'

'I am going for a walk.'

This was in the big hall. Vivien, passing through it, had seen him standing under the porch, looking at the mail-phaeton and the pair of big bays that Mr. Slade had provided for his use; and immediately he came back into the hall to perform his little act of kindness.

'Don't go for a walk. Come for a drive with me. It will do you more good than walking.'

He spoke very kindly and she was grateful to him for the sympathy that prompted him to ask for her company; but, as she explained, she could not accept the offer. She could not disappoint her dog. He was waiting for her at the stables.

'Oh, what a bore!' said my lord. 'I wish you could have come.'

As she stood in the quadrangle of the stables, whistling for the dog, the mail-phaeton stopped outside the archway.

'Miss Shelton, do come. Bring Pincher with you. Hi, good dog, Pincher, Pincher!' and his lordship whistled shrilly as the dog came scampering out from the stables.

'Very well,' said Vivien, 'if you don't mind my bringing him, I'll come. His name is not Pincher. He is called Imp.'

'Catch hold of him,' said his lordship to the groom who had got down and was standing at the horses' heads; 'catch hold of him and put him in behind.'

'No, he must sit with me if you don't mind.'

'All right. Jump up,' and he gave her his hand. 'I say, will you be warm enough?' and he put the cloth rug across her knees and gave the dog a friendly pat. 'Good dog.' Then to the groom, 'I shan't want you,' and away they drove.

'Didn't want that chap sitting straining his ugly ears to catch every word we say, did we, Pincher?' he said to the dog and laughed good-humouredly. Then, without looking at her, he said gravely and very kindly, 'I was so dreadfully sorry to hear of your father's death. Granny only told me yesterday. I am afraid it was a great shock to you—quite unexpected, granny told me. I am dreadfully sorry.'

He was wonderfully kind. That was all he said about her loss, and then at once began to talk pleasantly and lightly, in the chaffing, schoolboy tone that seemed to be always natural to him.

'I say, you might have got your dog a better collar. That looks as if it was made for some old maid's cat.'

'I thought it was rather pretty. Imp and I walked all the way to Tellhurst to get it. What's wrong with it?'

'Well, a dog's collar oughtn't to be like an old lady's garter, you know—red flannel inside and all that—especially a real sporting, high-class dog like yours.'

He was rude to the dog in saying this ironically; and he was very rude about the collar; but somehow she did not mind. His laughing voice had kindness in it, and before they reached the park gates he had made her laugh for the first time for many weeks. He could not be very wicked really. Imp pushed his nose into one of the big pockets of his loose coat and seemed to consider him a really good sort.

'There's that old frump that comes toadying granny. What's her name? . . . How d'ye do, Mrs. Roberts,' and he took off his hat and then saluted with his whip. 'Good-bye, Mrs. Roberts. I'm glad I'm not Mr. Roberts to have you sitting opposite me at meals.'

The vicar's wife, unconscious of these compliments, bowed very graciously to my lord; and then, with pinched lips and staring eyes, stood fascinated by the jingling, clattering phaeton. Miss Shelton driving alone with his lordship! Oh incredibly outrageous! Mrs. Roberts for one did not approve of the little act of kindness.

'You look better already. You know, company is good for

people. It doesn't do to be too solitary—while you are young. It's all right when you get to my age.'

'How old are you really?'

Then he told her. He was the same age as she herself.

'I am very old for my years of course. I tell you, sometimes I feel a thousand. I get so sick of everything. That's an awful feeling, when you . . . I say, what an ass your dog is! Do tell him I haven't got a rat in my pocket.'

He could not be altogether bad. He had the power of spreading about him an atmosphere of pleasant careless good-fellowship. He could make one feel that one had known him for an immensely long time, that this sense of frank comradeship was based on childish memories, that one had really known him as a child, and that now after many years one saw him again. The dog seemed to have this impression strongly. He was vastly enjoying the drive.

'What do you mean by filling one's life with work?' he asked her presently. 'You make a great mistake if you think I'm idle. What with soldiering and one thing and other I work like a slave.'

'But perhaps it's all empty, foolish work—no good to yourself or anybody else.'

'Hullo. Have you been reading society novels? Has old Henry Frensham been picking you out all the bosh he could find for you? That's just the sort of stuff they say in the novels.'

Gradually he made her talk. They were not a mile from the park gates, and already she was chatting freely, exchanging confidence for confidence.

'No, I have been reading all the heaviest books in the library. I don't get my ideas from novels. They are my own—built upon a solid foundation of the works of all the best philosophers. Do you ever read—anything at all?'

'No, not now. I have read everything that's worth reading. Your philosophers could tell me nothing. I am a philosopher myself.'

Then he gave her his philosophic views upon life. He really had views, she was surprised to find. He had read too—incredibly more than one would have suspected; and he had thought at some period of his vapid existence. He was not to be frightened by big names, or crushed with the weight of garbled quotations. He was an optimist, it appeared. The world was all right, getting better and better every day, and it could very well take care of itself. You could not hasten perceptibly its progress to higher things, but here and there it was possible to retard the advance by stupid interference: to postpone the coming

of boons to humanity until they were long overdue. Later, when he took up politics, this would be his message to mankind in general and the Upper House in particular.

But it was time now to squash him with the remorseless logic of the late Mr. Darwin.

'How can you say the world is all right when you think of the sum of misery among all living things—the horrible carnage, destruction—a battlefield—the—the ghastly struggle for life—'

'The sum of happiness must be greater than the sum of misery. You forget that Darwin bases his principal argument on that plain fact.'

'I beg your pardon, he never says anything of the kind. He says again and again—about the destruction—and the endless misery.'

But my lord, in his turn begging pardon, slowly but surely beat her on her own ground. It was a horrid thing to happen —when she had brought out her big gun, to have it captured, trained against her, and her position rendered untenable by her own weapon; but certainly if squashing of anybody occurred it was not of Lord Helensburgh. He had mastered the Darwinian theory, as conveyed to pampered little lords in some hateful primer—two bald pages of concentrated deadly accuracy—without having the trouble of reading the marvellous intricate books themselves.

'Well then I don't care what Darwin thought,' she said, rallying after retreat. 'This is what *I* think.'

'Ah do tell me that. Now we shall have something interesting at last.'

Then, as they drove through the wide, well-tilled fields, between the close-trimmed hedges that marked the great lady's domain, she told him of her pessimistic conviction slowly evolved from the old philosophic doctrines of negatives, slowly strengthened by personal observation, settled and cemented and bound together by long reflection, and now quite her own unshakeable belief. The world was horrible: no place for thinking organisms that could remember and foretell. All that one might hope for, crave for, pray for, was a respite from pain.

'Well I'm hanged,' said Lord Helensburgh. 'I wonder you aren't ashamed to say such a thing before Pincher.'

'He knows it as well as I do. We are of one mind.'

As she stooped to pat the dog my lord looked at her with a thoughtful smile.

'I say, if you really think all that at your age, I'm afraid it means that you've had rather a bad time of it,' and his voice took a tone of quite extraordinary kindness—i. sympathy almost

childish in its completeness: as of a child condoling most sincerely with its playmate. 'What a shame! Have you had such rough luck as all that? Trouble and sorrow—all the time?'

'No,' said Vivien. 'Not myself, so much. But I've always been *seeing* sorrow. I've always been in touch with sadness, I mean, seeing sad things—until I came here. But I've had a long respite in the last year.'

'I'm glad of that,' said Lord Helensburgh in the same kind voice. 'I'm glad you haven't been unhappy at Hawkridge.'

Up to now the drive had been very pleasant. But here, so far as she was concerned, the drive and the pleasantness came to an end together.

An absurd little pony-cart with a ridiculously small pony, emerging from a lane, came into the road just in front of them. In the tiny cart, all by herself, was a lady in grey fur and a green toque, who pulled up her little toy of a pony, and with her whip waved to Helensburgh to pull up his big horses; and then in a moment he and Mrs. Arncliffe were deep in conversation.

'I thought you had gone back to London,' said Mrs. Arncliffe. 'I thought you were going yesterday. You might have stayed another day at Laura's.'

She was angry and surprised. Her red lips closed tight and her eyes had the hard glitter of anger in them. But this flash of wrath was gone in a moment: the white teeth showed again, and she went on talking to him in a low, smooth voice. She had been bored to death in the last two days, she said, and she had borrowed Laura's pony and cart and pretended that she wanted to go to Tellhurst to buy something—simply to escape the *ennui* that now filled Hacketts.

'I have heaps of news for you,' she said confidentially. 'I heard from Mabel Rice this morning and she declares,' etc. With her gloved hand resting on the splash-board of the phaeton, she talked to him about their friends and their friends' foolish affairs, giving him a budget of trivial gossip, forcing him to listen, interesting him, absorbing him. She had ignored Vivien entirely. Once or twice she looked at the place by her lover's side where Vivien was sitting. She looked with a careless glance as though the seat had been empty. Helensburgh seemed to have forgotten that there was anybody sitting beside him. Absorbed by the woman's gossip, he did not observe that Vivien had pushed back the cloth rug. He looked round with a start when she jumped down into the road, and saw the faithful Imp jumping down after her.

'I am going to walk back,' said Vivien, 'I must give my dog some exercise.'

'Oh, I say, don't do that. We are miles from home.'

There was a gate a little way down the road, and without answering she opened the gate and took to the fields. The dog, tearing on in front of her, evidently thought that they had exhausted the delights of driving, and that the walk home across country was a grand idea.

Helensburgh called after her, but she did not turn her head. When, after passing through two or three gates, she looked back, the pony-cart and the phaeton had separated.

That evening when she was going to Lady Colwyn's room, the young man was in the corridor. He had been waiting there to speak to her, he said.

'You know when you bolted off,' he said apologetically, 'I hope you didn't think me rude for stopping talking so long?'

'Oh no, why should I think it rude?' said Vivien coldly.

'But you seemed to nip away in such a hurry.'

'I told you I wanted a walk—because of the dog.'

'Perhaps I ought to have explained to you that I *had* to stop, because that lady was an extremely old friend—Mrs. Arncliffe.'

'Oh yes,' said Vivien very coldly. 'I know all about Mrs. Arncliffe.'

In the village and in the great house my lord's little act of kindness was well discussed to-night. His lordship had left the porch alone, but he had gone through the park-gates with Miss Shelton by his side. He had been away for a couple of hours, and then he had returned alone. Miss Shelton had come back on foot. Miss Shelton must have left the carriage on the return journey somewhere outside the park-gates, thinking, no doubt, that by walking across the park she would escape observation. His lordship had not taken the groom who should have accompanied the carriage.

Mrs. Mapleton, prowling about the stairs and landings of the servants' world behind the closed doors, emitted catlike sounds, and with spluttering hints fed the chatter of such of the servants as she condescended to speak with.

'Well, here's fine goings-on—upon me word,' said Mrs. Mapleton. 'I wonder what her ladyship'll have to say when she comes to hear of it? It can't be kep' from her long—such goings-on as this.'

In fact her ladyship was already aware of what had happened.

'Granny,' said the young man, 'I took your Miss Shelton with me this afternoon. But she wouldn't go very far. She walked home.'

'Indeed!'

'Yes, I persuaded her to come. She looked so awfully sad

and lonely that I thought it would do her good to have some one to talk to.'

'Did you, Harry? That was kind of you.'

This was when Lady Colwyn and her grandson were alone before dinner. The gentleness of the stern old dame's voice when these two were quite alone was very remarkable. On such occasions only, she called him Harry.'

'She's an interesting girl, your Miss Shelton—a lot cleverer than most girls, I should think,' he went on. 'I didn't believe when Johnny Hartnell told me. He told me she was the wisest and the kindest girl he had ever met.'

'I don't think your friend Sir John Hartnell is a judge of girls,' and the old lady laughed grimly, but not unkindly. 'I cannot compliment him on his choice of a wife.'

'Oh, you were always down on poor old Augusta,' and the young man laughed also. 'You mayn't believe it, granny, but they are as happy as the day is long. But I was going to ask you about Miss Shelton. She does seem most awfully sad. She speaks like a girl who has gone through a lot of trouble.'

'I told you her father died recently.'

'Yes, I know, but that isn't enough to account for it. Do you know much about her? Has she told you much about her life before she came to you?'

Then the old lady gave the young man some information about her lady-in-waiting. In truth she thought that my lord had already expended more than enough time and attention upon so unimportant a subject. But whatever he did was right. Even in the matter of Hacketts, she tried not to criticise his conduct. It was a duty as well as a delight to answer any questions he might put to her. He was the head of the house —the proud old lady never for a moment forgot this. He was already a reigning prince: she was only the dowager princess. Soon he would be a great sovereign, ruler of all the family dominions.

'I am quite contented with her. She suits me very well,' she said finally. 'Those solicitors who gave her an excellent character, have written to me again—the other day. I do not know why they should consider it necessary to write to me—but they are respectable people, and no doubt they meant well.'

'What did they write about?'

'About this father of hers. He was a bad father, it seems. It is to the girl's credit that she never spoke disrespectfully of him, or made any complaints—when I myself have spoken of the man.'

'And that is all you know about her, granny? It isn't much, is it?'

'That is all I know—except this, which is curious,' said Lady Colwyn thoughtfully. 'The girl has at least one enemy.'

'Who the dickens is that? Not old Mapleton? I don't think you ought to stand any jealous nonsense of old Mapleton's.'

'Oh no. This is not my good Mapleton. If she is jealous, it is because she is devoted. This is an anonymous letter-writer. I received two anonymous letters about Miss Shelton last year.'

'Did you? What did the letters say?'

'I scarcely read them. They were attacks on the girl's character by some one who professed to have known her in London.'

'What a shame! All lies of course.'

'When people write letters and are afraid to sign them, of course they tell lies,' said Lady Colwyn. 'I threw the lies into the fire, but they set me wondering—wondering who this particular liar might be.'

The Vicar of Hawkridge, sitting in his study making notes for his sermon, had this evening been cruelly disturbed by his wife. Again and again, she bothered him about Miss Shelton and his lordship's phaeton, snapping with her sharp tongue thread after thread of his slender argument, introducing her vulgar, acrimonious reflections among his most pious, meditative passages, making the brain of the good old man ache and throb as though some one had been beating on his bald head with a wooden hammer.

'I shall certainly warn Lady Colwyn,' said Mrs. Roberts.

'I wouldn't do it if I were you.'

'I shall go to-morrow morning and open her eyes. This is a great danger—I have told you that I have long regarded Miss Shelton as a very great danger.'

'I have given you my advice. Lady Colwyn can take care of herself.'

'I will not stand by and see her imposed upon. I am not such a coward as you. Lady Colwyn has never been the spectre to me that she is to most people. I am greatly attached to her, but I cannot kow-tow to her. She ought to be warned, and I shall warn her.'

The poor old man shrugged his shoulders and tried to go on with the sermon. He knew—with painful certainty—that his wife would in truth sprawl on her face on the floor and allow Lady Colwyn to beat her with a broomstick all one day, if Lady Colwyn would consent to take her out driving on the next.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Roberts to Mrs. Mapleton, 'I do want to see her quite alone, if you can manage it—when Miss Shelton is out of the way, of course. I've nothing to do this morning—I'll wait here just as long as you like.'

Mapleton hastened on her mission and soon returned.

'She'll see you now. Come as quick as you can. The coast is clear.'

And then Mrs. Roberts was rapidly led from the modest retreat in which she had been waiting, by stone passages, through swinging baize-covered doors, out into the open magnificence of the hall and staircase, and onward and upward into the presence of the great lady, to give her friendly warning.

'Mrs. Roberts, be careful.'

'Why?' and the vicar's wife quailed.

'Are you not forgetting yourself?'

'Oh, I hope not'—in faltering tones—'I 'm sure not, but—'

'One would suppose,' said Lady Colwyn in an awful voice, 'that you were presuming to offer advice to me.'

'Oh Lady Colwyn, how can you say such a dreadful thing? So cruel! You know I would not *dare*,' etc. etc.

O wretched, cringing. woman, the broomstick would be less degrading than this! Lady Colwyn thoroughly enjoyed the brief interview. Mrs. Roberts came out into the corridor with red cheeks and a shaking under lip, and wished that her ally had not been waiting to escort her downstairs again.

'You've made a mess of it. I can see it in your face,' said Mapleton with insolent familiarity.

By the first post one morning, two or three days after Lord Helensburgh had returned to London, Vivien received a registered parcel. She sat up in bed, unpacking it and wondering. Something of her father's—something that belonged to him, which the solicitors had somehow saved from the sale of his effects, and which they were sending to her to keep as a souvenir? But when all the wrappers had been removed and the last tissue papers lifted, there lay in her lap a jeweller's case and a visiting card. Lord Helensburgh's card and a few words on the face of it:—

'With kind regards. A collar for Pincher!'

The absurd splendour of the thing—when she opened the box—almost took her breath away. A thing like a necklace, of flexible gold chains and gold bands, made like a strap with buckle and pin—all the bands encrusted or studded with big turquoises and pearls. She stared at it in wonder. It was of course an imitated splendour. 'Cold,' as they used to say at

Mrs. Maitland's, not gold; sham gems, but a marvellously good imitation, exactly like the real things. But how preposterous! An Eastern rajah might think it a very suitable ornament for a favourite dog. But, here in England—? Then, looking at it more closely, it quite took her breath away. It was not *cold*: it had little hall marks on each of the bands; and the pearls and turquoises were real.

Oh why had he done this? He had cruelly affronted her the other day. With soft words and sympathy, he had for an hour thrown about her that inexplicable spell of good comradeship that he alone, of all the men that she had ever seen, mysteriously possessed. For an hour he had made her happy under the spell, had made her forget that he was selfish and foolish and wicked, had drawn from her spoken thoughts instead of empty words; then, in a moment, at the sight of that other woman, he had ceased to remember her existence. He had broken the spell in the middle of a sentence: with an unfinished phrase on his lips, had begun to show her his wickedness in full swing. And he hoped he had not been rude! He was not slow-witted: he realised that he and the shameless woman together had been grossly, vulgarly insulting her when they whispered and laughed and ignored her—taking no more pains to conceal the disgraceful terms of their intimacy than if she had been miles away. Now, this present was to make amends for his rudeness. Suddenly, with unutterable disgust, she thought of Claude Stanford. Had he not done the same thing? The glittering solace after outrage and insult! This young man was richer, fabulously richer, than the other man, and he had spent a few more pounds. That was all the difference. The vulgar thought was intrinsically the same with both. And she had dreamed of him —dreamed of him by night and by day—as her prince.

There was no address on the card and she did not know where this young man, who already owned so many houses and who was soon to own so many more, really lived. But in the course of the day she asked Mr. Frensham. She did not care to ask Lady Colwyn for this information. The old librarian gave her several addresses, but seemed to think that the barracks at Knightsbridge was the safest direction.

'He doesn't use his clubs,' said Mr. Frensham. 'He's told me so himself. But if he's in London, the barracks will find him.'

'What you have been good enough to send me,' she wrote, 'is far too valuable for me to use. I do not want my poor dog to be stolen from me for the sake of his collar, so I am returning it with many thanks for your kind thought.'

And this, of all the pretty things that Lord Helensburgh had sent to ladies, was the first that had ever been refused with thanks. A gift had often evoked protest; he had been told that it was altogether too bad of him, that his audacity had caused wakeful nights, that he had made the recipient so angry that she doubted if she could, even under the softening influence of time, really forgive him; but never before had one of the pretty things come back by registered post.

The same early delivery that brought the dog collar for Vivien brought a letter for Lady Colwyn—from a well-wisher.

'The young lady,' said Well-wisher, 'who acts as Lady Colwyn's paid companion all day was recently the *paid companion* after dark of a man-about-town. A few inquiries would speedily elicit further particulars.'

Lady Colwyn glanced, when the time came for her to read her letters, through this well-wishing letter, then cast it into the fire. When people wrote letters they were ashamed to sign, they wrote lies; and that was the way to deal with their lies.

XXVIII

IT seemed that from the time of her father's death the lurking Spirit of Sadness had returned to the great house. It was as though the Spirit had discovered that the dog was not allowed to come within doors to chase it, bark at it, and make light of it; and the Spirit understood that the dog's mistress was again at its mercy. Outside the house the Spirit left her unmolested; but, inside, it lay in wait, and sat with her, read with her, whispered to her for hour after hour in every long day.

'A letter for you,' said the Spirit. 'I was present when it was written. I have been whispering to you ever since. I have prepared you for it, so you ought not to be really surprised.'

It was an infinitely sad letter from Marian.

The man—the horrible man with the thick moustache and the yachting cap—had proved faithless, and Marian was in despair: almost out of her mind from grief.

'I don't care what happens to me now,' said Marian, echoing that dreadful cry of her sex under unbearable suffering at the hands of abominable men. 'I can never get over it—I feel if I wasn't a coward the wisest thing I could do would be to throw myself into the river and be done with it. To be all alone after these years is worse than death—I simply can't bear it—and now I feel I simply don't care what happens to me.'

It was horrible to read this reiterated cry. Poor Marian—of all people the one that Vivien had most truly loved! So gentle and kind, but so utterly weak: by nature incapable of withstanding this form of sorrow, devoid of all power to meet with dignity or self-control the grief that men inflict! Even as she read, in the midst of her pity, there returned to her mind those far-off words of the sapient Bauermann—words that for years had seemed so false until poor Marian herself proved them to be true. 'Kind, yes, but as water weak.'

'Oh Vi, I have known it would end like this. For a long time I have known. He made it plain enough but I wouldn't see, wouldn't believe that he could really be so cruel. He was always making excuses. When everything was arranged and I had been counting the minutes to the time of our meeting, he

would disappoint just at the last—a telegram to say it was impossible. Then, the last time, when he was to come there was not even a telegram. I was to meet him at Liverpool Street Station and I waited there till the last train, then went home thinking that perhaps after all he might have come up earlier in the day and that I should find him waiting for me. But of course he was not there. Not even a telegram to say why he hadn't come. Oh Vi, if you could guess all I suffered that night, understanding that this was the end, you would pity me.'

And indeed Vi pitied her from the bottom of her heart.

'You know,' Marian continued, 'he had obtained his promotion, and he always used to say that when he was given a ship, we would think about getting married if all went well. He used to say that from the very beginning. But when he got his ship he never said a word. I never said a word either, but he talked about the expenses and said he seemed to be worse off than ever. You know, making excuses and explanations although I had asked for none. Well then I thought now perhaps this was what had really come between us. His old promise made him feel uncomfortable. He felt that he ought to marry me but he was not really able to, and that made him ashamed of being with me. When I thought this I began to hope again and made up my mind to tell him at once it did not matter. What did I care if only he would go on loving me and not throw me over altogether?'

Then poor Marian described how, at the end of the week, when she could get away from her shop, she had gone down to Harwich to see the man.

'But oh Vi! he was so cruel. He was very angry with me for coming and said that if I had any sense I would never have done such a thing. He said my coming down unexpectedly like that might ruin his reputation, and give him a bad name with everybody. He said in all his experience he had never known a girl come hunting a man like that. I felt that I should die when he said such cruel things, but I told him in all his experience he had never known a girl who loved him as truly as I did, and *why* I had come *hunting* him—only to release him from his promise and to beg only to let us go on as before.

'But nothing would make him kind. He took me to the station and made me go back to London by the very first train. Then when I was in the carriage and he stood by the door to say good-bye, he told me that it must be good-bye for ever. I was crying so that I could hardly speak, but at last I told him I supposed he had found some other girl to be fond of him and he said I had guessed the riddle. If I must have the truth

there was somebody else, and as I would be sure to hear of it sooner or later, he might as well tell me that he was going to be married to her in a month. And then as the very last cruel thing to say, he said he trusted to my good sense not to go and write to the girl he was engaged to and try to make mischief in that way. I felt he had broken my heart when he said that. For oh Vi, when have I ever done anything mean or unkind to him, in all the time he has known me? He did not even kiss me in parting. He was cruel to the very last.'

And again came that desperate cry of her sex suffering the torment of male desertion. 'So now I don't care what happens to me.'

Vivien went up to London and spent the next Saturday afternoon with her friend, trying to comfort her, to brace her courage with affection and with philosophy.

They sat together in the too ample and expensive room that the unhappy girl had maintained for the entertainment of her coarse and brutal tyrant. She was leaving now. Everything here reminded her of the man and his cruelty. She had worked as an uncomplaining slave to acquire each piece of handsome furniture and every little ornament; night and day she had toiled to buy the pretty things that should do honour to her selfish master; with tired eyes and aching fingers she had laboured at her evening tasks in order to keep this extravagant, high-rented temple of her love week after week, year after year. With her arms about Vivien's neck, as they sat side by side on the big bed, she sobbed out her grief and desolation and was not to be consoled by affectionate pity or philosophic argument.

'Marian, dear, he was never worthy of you. It was the greatest misfortune that you ever met him. He was most unworthy of your love.'

'Oh Vi I loved him.'

'Yes I know, dear—and he has shown his unworthiness by not knowing what a treasure he had won. But now that he has gone—if you are brave—'

'Oh Vi—how can I be brave?—you don't know what love is or you wouldn't talk like that—you don't know what it is to be all alone again—after years of love.'

'Yes dear. Of course you must suffer at first, but in time—not a very long time perhaps, you will meet some one else—a good man who will be fond of you—'

'No one will ever be fond of me again—I'm getting old. No one will care for me now.'

'Nonsense. Marian dear, no one could know you without being fond of you. Of course you'll soon find some one else.'

'Vi—I shall give myself to the very first man who wants me—if he's a crossing sweeper. I don't care what happens to me now.'

Then Vivien reproached her friend for uttering words of this reckless, wickedly reckless character. Marian had made one most dreadful mistake that could not by any possibility have led to happiness. Now was her chance of retrieving this almost fatal error. All her life now lay open before her; she must be brave and good and patient as she used to be in the dear old school days; and it could not be but that happiness would come to her. Above all, she must try to recover her self-respect and her old quiet strength, and never, never think or say that she would be careless of her own fate.

'Oh Vi, I say what I feel to *you*. Why should I hide from you what I think? I tell you I am utterly miserable.'

Vivien went back to Hawkridge with a heavy heart. It was dreadful to leave her dear Marian alone, inconsolable, a most melancholy figure as she stood waving her damp pocket-handkerchief after the vanishing train. The poor girl had clung to Vivien's company till the last moment, and had shed tears before newspaper boys, ticket collectors, and all the world. But she had promised to write to dear Vi nearly every day; and she had promised to try to be really brave, to try to regain her gentle dignity and calm self-reliance.

During this sad time, when Vivien's heart was being torn by thoughts of the pain suffered by this loved friend of her youth, another sufferer claimed sympathy.

This was Dr. Quinlan. His last two letters formed only less distressing reading than Marian's. Nothing could have been more unfortunate for poor Dr. Quinlan than Vivien's appeal for aid in her hour of trouble. It appeared that disastrously unhappy consequences had resulted. Just when he was perhaps slowly beginning to recover after his great disappointment, she had disturbed his returning peace of mind, had summoned him to her side, leant upon him in her helplessness, made him for a week her support, and in these seven days had completely undone the healing work of nearly a whole year. And he was in consequence more in love with her than ever. 'If you only knew,' he wrote, 'the effort it cost me not to tell you this even in the height of your sorrow, you would hear me with patience now.'

In both letters, he pleaded as a man pleads for mercy when he has lost hope of all else. If only she would be merciful and marry him, she would save him from despair. Without her, he

now felt that he could not face the blankness of his future life. She had so thoroughly unsettled him that ambition, duty, the work he used to glory in, were all as nothing. If she would not change her mind and become Mrs. Quinlan, he would have to give up everything and go to the ends of the earth—a wanderer seeking forgetfulness, at all cost, in the face of all perils.

Now, he had come down to Hawkridge for oral supplication after the letters, and Vivien, with a heart aching from the sadness of life, was giving him a very patient hearing. They were in that pleasant but humble parlour wherein Dr. James had on one occasion made her so miserable by a discussion of his nephew's suffering. Here had been brought to them tea and thin bread and butter of brown bread and white bread, toast and jam, and most delicate cakes and biscuits. Thus the great house entertained even its humblest guests—with wasteful luxury and overabundant plenty—and Dr. Quinlan ate heartily, at first from hunger and then quite automatically, as he told her of the genuine anguish of which she was the cause.

'Thank you,' said Dr. Quinlan. 'Yes, I should like another cup. I did not lunch to-day. I came straight from the hospital,' and, as the good young man sipped and munched, he analysed his feelings, laid bare all his thought concerning her, with a curious earnestness of intention and a complete *naïveté* of method.

In order to enable her clearly to understand his lamentable situation, he explained that in falling in love with her he had also fallen in love with the idea of marriage. Long before he had broached the subject to her, he had built up the brain-pictures—with her as nucleus—of the peace of the nuptial home, the sweet wife-partner, the calm love-lit retreat—mental conceptions which he had never created hitherto, but which now had formed with astonishing rapidity and a strength that altogether surprised him. Thus, when called upon to renounce his dream of obtaining her, his loss was very great indeed. With her went all the newly acquired hopes and cravings: the subsidiary longings that his love for her had first stimulated.

'I don't think you can really understand this—how strong all these feelings are in a man of my age, who, like myself, has not enjoyed the companionship of women, who has thought very little about women. I think I told you that until I met you, I had never contemplated marriage—I had really thought of very little else besides my work.'

Automatically supplying himself, first with brown bread, then with white, he carefully went over the ground of that slow process of interrupted cure—describing how the brain-pictures

had faded, weakened, and slowly lost influence, while he resolutely went on with his daily labour until she had fetched him out to assist in the sad business of her papa's demise, and in a moment the mental picture-gallery had been restored.

'Of course you understand I am not blaming you—not complaining,' said Dr. Quinlan, finishing his bread and butter and looking at her with solemnly wistful eyes. 'I only want you to realise that I am now more miserable than ever—that without you I feel that my lonely life has become altogether insupportable.'

Then, at the sound of this piteous appeal, which so strangely echoed that other cry of distress—Marian's desolate plaint—Vivien was moved with an extraordinary inspiration.

'Do you want a heart of gold?'

'I want you,' said Dr. Quinlan.

'But Dr. Quinlan, will you take somebody else instead—some one a thousand times nicer and kinder than I am—who will make you ever so much happier than I ever could? I know a girl who would make you the best wife in all the world.'

Dr. Quinlan had suddenly flushed; and, rising, he picked up his gloves and hat.

'Is that your answer? Is that all you can say to me after what I have said to you? I regret that you can only laugh at me for loving you.'

He was, it seemed, bitterly offended, mortally wounded by her astounding suggestion.

'Dr. Quinlan, don't be angry. Don't go. I am speaking most seriously. I am more sorry than I can say that I have caused you nothing but trouble and—and pain, when I owe you all my gratitude.'

'There is nothing to be grateful for—but I think you might have spared me your offer of another wife. I think you might at least have understood me.'

'Please don't be angry. I do understand, and I am so dreadfully sorry. But, Dr. Quinlan, I am speaking of a girl I love—my dearest friend—I have known her almost all my life—Will you see her and talk to her? Will you let me arrange—'

But Dr. Quinlan was not to be mollified by eager praise of this unseen substitute. He was, most plainly, deeply wounded, and very gravely he bade Vivien good-bye, and left her at the richly-spread tea-table to reflect at leisure upon the blunder she had committed.

All that evening Vivien thought about it. Why not? Really the idea had been an inspiration. They were both unhappy,

miserable because each was lonely and pining for love—why should they not console each other? She thought of Lady Augusta in her grief at the loss of the lover who had gone to India. How readily the tearful Augusta had transferred her affection, how swiftly the new love had healed the wounds of the old love! But Marian was softer, more yielding, altogether gentler than the vigorous, reckless Augusta. Who could doubt that, if only one could apply the same treatment to Marian, her cure would be at least as rapid as the other's? And the good young man, so strong, so simple, and so honest? If, as he had confessed, the frustrated yearning for nuptial joys, as considered in a widely general view, formed a large part of his trouble, he too was surely ripe for such a cure!

She had been a fool, she thought, to blurt out her scheme with an abruptness that had seemed to him indelicate and heartless. She ought to have slowly prepared the ground, steadily worked to accomplish the plan, but never disclosed the idea itself. However, she would not renounce the idea: with reasoned thought she would set to work. She would not be frightened by his anger, or discouraged by initial difficulties. It should be child's play to her unsupported attack upon Sir John Hartnell. Yet in that first essay at what is supposed to be the dowagers' art of match-making she had been successful. If she had been able to help Lady Augusta, a chance acquaintance, surely she should be able to help her dearest friend.

That night she wrote to Dr. Quinlan, humbly apologising for her suggestion. It had been uttered, she told him, as a sudden spontaneous wish that she had not been able to repress. But she could see now that anything sounding like a doubt of his constancy and settled purpose must offend, and she was very sorry. She knew the strength and depth of his character, and she had not for a moment thought he would—most naturally—interpret her words as a hint that he could in any circumstances be wavering or fickle. Moreover, she must explain that as this young lady, Miss Marian Draper, was the person to whom she was most devoted in all the world, it was the highest compliment she could pay him to wish that Miss Draper had obtained the honour of his regard instead of herself; and here she gave a brief sketch of Miss Draper:—an old school friend, the daughter of a Devonshire clergyman, one of a large family, who had worked for her living ever since she left school, etc. 'I rather thought that you had met her,' she went on, 'when I was ill at Marefield Street. She was often with me. You would remember her by her eyes—the most lovely blue eyes any girl ever had. Then, when you went away to-day, I was going to

say that I wished you could at least meet her again. I thought that perhaps you would not have minded meeting and taking her out—perhaps for a walk some Sunday. It would have been a kindness to her, and a kindness to me. She is just now very lonely, and I hope it is not wrong to say that she is very sad in her loneliness; that she has known disappointment. Really, when I made you angry, that was what I was going to say. I am sorry that in speaking hastily I had spoken my secret wish and that you would not listen to me any further.'

It was three or four days before Dr. Quinlan replied to this letter. Then he wrote:—

'I am sorry if I seemed angry. If your words gave me pain, I should not have allowed you to see that it was so from any change in my manner. I hope that you will not think badly of me for a weakness that I ought to have been able to conceal. If, as you say, it is the slightest kindness to you, I shall be very glad to meet your friend. Her eyes might have been any colour in the rainbow, and I should not, I think, have observed their tint. Will you write to Miss Draper and inform her that you have authorised me to write to her, or will you tell me if I should call upon her? It can, I fear, be no kindness to her to inflict my society upon her even for an hour. I shall be able to talk to her of nothing but you, because you are all that I can think of.'

Then, in less than a week, a letter came from Marian, to whom Vivien, after much reasoned thought, had unfolded her idea. Anything that gave dear Marian something to think about must be beneficial. And, if success were to come, it must now be brought about by Marian herself. She could not be kept in the dark: her task lay clear before her. She was to be kind to somebody in his sadness and loneliness: to comfort and console some one who had suffered disappointment.

'He came on Saturday,' wrote Marian, 'and he took me down to Richmond to see a football match. It was his old hospital that played and they won. I did not understand the game, and it was rather cold. Oh Vi, how kind and good he is, and how much he loves you, dear! We talked of you all the time except during the football. After it was over we had tea at rather a nice shop in Richmond where there was a girl who reminded me of Clara. Then we came back and the train was very crowded and we hardly talked at all.

'He was very kind all the time, but oh Vi it can lead to nothing for either of us—not even friendship. If he knew me a hundred years he would never care for me. I like his expression so manly and so grave but it is one that is easy to read.

Sometimes when he looked at me I knew that his mind had wandered far away, so that he did not even *see* me. If I met him in the street to-morrow I don't believe he would recognise me.'

Certainly this first letter from Marian was not very hopeful. Yet this at least seemed gained: the cry of despair had been silenced. This one afternoon under strange male escort had produced a certain effect. The poor girl had been given something to distract her mind. The simple little suburban excursion had broken the thread of her solitary brooding on the past.

'Why,' asked Marian in her next letter, 'cannot you love him? He is so good and frank and honest that I do believe he is worthy of your love. If you are sure there is really no one else that you do love, why cannot you say yes, dearest Vi, and make him happy as I truly think he deserves to be?

'He came again just when I had got home one night and he took me out to dine with him. He said he knew nothing about all the new restaurants but he wanted to take me to a big one with a band to cheer me up and he said the Criterion. But I told him about the Mentone so quiet and nice and in the end we went there. He is generous or he would not want to spend so much money at one of the grand restaurants. It made me happy all that evening being at the dear old Mentone again, and we both talked of you. And he talked so nicely about his work among all the poor people—he told me Mrs. Kearsley has been very ill, off and on for months, and he has attended her. And I know, though he did not say, that he has attended her for nothing—simply out of love for you. He kept saying that it was at Mrs. Kearsley's he first met you. I think a doctor's calling must be a very noble one and when it is all among poor people it is all the more noble.'

Now as, one after another, Marian's reports came in, Vivien awaited the arrival of the next report with growing eagerness, with fluctuations of hope and fear that made the days pass by in an excited longing for postal deliveries. With almost incredible rapidity, the sadness had disappeared from Marian's closely-written sheets. The new interest had completely absorbed her: sometimes in a long letter there was not a single doleful note struck. Without allusion to her past sorrow, she wrote now calmly and sanely, almost cheerfully, of Saturday and Sunday walks and talks with Dr. Quinlan, of the week's work in her mantle shop, of a new dress that she was making for herself, of the hat to be chosen to place on top of the dress. Whatever came of her brilliant idea, Vivien was sure that already Marian

was partially cured, that the old wounds were giving little, if any, pain. If success might crown the work, how happy and how proud she would be in the achievement of this wonderful, inspired piece of match-making!

But then came a bombshell: a letter from Marian into which all the sadness had returned with a rush.

'I will not see him again,' wrote poor Marian. 'Oh Vi what is the good of it all? If I let it go on it will only make me more miserable than ever. He would never care for me—not if we went out for walks and down to Richmond for a hundred years. He would never, never really care a straw for me. So what *is* the use? But I admire him and I respect him—after all I have gone through, coming to me just when I had been cast off—as though no one on earth wanted me, of course every kind word he said must draw me to him. Of course he seems by contrast a man that any girl must be proud of, the sort of man who could never do a mean or cruel action, and of course if I went on seeing him I should get fond of him. How could I help it?

'Besides it is all hopeless from the very first. Oh Vi I love you for your sweet unselfish thoughts for wishing my happiness, but oh Vi I wish you had never begun it. Suppose everything had happened just as you said you hoped. Suppose, because he was unhappy too, he had begun to like me more and more until, as you said, he had wanted me to be his wife. I should have been forced to tell him about *him*. I must have told him the truth and asked him if that made any difference and if he still wanted me. Oh Vi did you ever think of that? I don't believe you did. Yet you must remember what *you* yourself thought when I told you.

'I never thought of it either at first—not till I began to feel that I should be fond of him. But now I know what he is—so frank and truthful and honest—of course I think of it, and see that even if he was really in love with me he would have given me up when I told him all about myself. And if that had happened I really should have committed suicide. I simply could not have borne it. So now I shall write and thank him for all his kindness but say that I cannot see him again.'

Here was matter for reasoned thought.

Vivien, after reading this letter, went for a very long walk with her dog. She had never thought of that horrible man with the thick moustache as a possible impediment in the way of her hope. Somehow it had never occurred to her that a wrong might be done to the young doctor. Yet in the altogether analogous case of Lady Augusta there had been doubt and qualms of con-

science. But Lady Augusta was a stranger: Marian was the loved friend of her youth. In the one case, it was easy to think calmly and dispassionately: in the other, one's love blinded one to plain facts. As she thought of these things now, she was filled with that yearning pity that had blended itself with her love from the hour in which Marian had told her story of too easy surrender, of fatally unselfish sacrifice. Oh how intolerably cruel it would be if the renunciation of a lifetime's happiness were now to be exacted as payment for Marian's past weakness!

She thought of it all that day and far into the night. It was the hour of crisis in the progress of her plan. Obviously, with Marian the cure was almost complete. When she spoke of beginning to be fond, she meant that the fondness was already an established phase. If she passed through this only to meet with another emotional disaster, it would be too horrible. Vivien, in trying to help her, would have done her irreparable injury. Estimating the chances, Vivien was full of confidence. Instinct, rather than reflection or experience, told her that the young man could not, would not long resist those soft blue eyes when they shone with love for him. Nobody could resist those sweet sentimental Devonshire creamy glances that Marian would begin unconsciously to shed. Certainly not Dr. Quinlan, with a mental picture-gallery waiting to be lit up by such love-light. Vivien did not fear but that the young man would also be cured.

But the problem of confession or suppression remained for a long while unanswerable. Here, Vivien called to her assistance all that old, half-forgotten wisdom of spectacled Miss Bauermann. It was curious how in ethical doubt, in all uncertainties of life-conduct, she was forced to fall back upon Bauermann. What would Bauermann have said now? Was this an occasion for confidenz or reticenz? 'There, Vi, is a policeman. Now will you tell him?' etc. Assuming that the policeman was represented by Dr. Quinlan, Vi had no shadow of doubt that she would never tell him. 'To betray is ever wrong.' But that particular Bauermann thesis was unfortunately inapplicable. It was poor Marian herself who would have to tell the police man, if anybody told him.

Then she tried—an almost impossible task—to put herself in the man's place. Well, it was life and death to a man. What had Sir John Hartnell said? He was an honest, brave little man, and she thought of him sitting with bowed head as he weighed Augusta in the balance. His fear had been surely more for the future than for the past. Was it not more what

Augusta would be than what Augusta had been? That, at any rate, was the keynote of all Augusta's protestations. 'All over and done with. I'll make the best wife a man ever had.' 'No,' thought Vivien, with swift determination, 'the second best, perhaps. Marian will be the best.'

She was sure at last. It was not a matter for reasoned thought: it really lay within the zone of instinct. Nobody must tell the policeman. By no law—ethical, social, or physical, was Marian bound to betray herself. A flower turning to the sun, asking so little of life, and a hog sniffing at it, then nearly trampling it to the ground. If the tracks of the obscene beast do not tell the story, shall the flower?

'My dearest Marian,' she wrote, 'you need never tell any man who wins your love one word about the past, except this. Say there was a man that you did care for, but you care for him no more. I am absolutely sure that this is right. I think it would be wise to say as much as that: say it is all over and done with, and not a word more. And, dearest Marian, make it all over and done with in your own mind. All the best books of philosophy say it is very wrong to brood upon the past. We belong to the present and the future, and the past must take care of itself. Now you must just forget *everything* in the past that would cause you the least pain to think of. Forget it utterly. Make it as though it had never been. And *when* you have forgotten it, you won't be so foolish as to talk about it. That is meant for a joke. But I am *most* serious in this strong advice.

'Now, if I were you, I would not think too much about Dr. Quinlan. If he does not fall in love with you, soon, somebody else will. You are the sweetest and the dearest girl that ever lived, and you may be quite sure that sooner or later some nice man will find this out for himself.'

'Oh my dearest Vi,' said Marian, replying to this letter. 'You have made me feel like a person who got a reprieve or a free pardon just when they were going to be hung. Oh Vi you have lifted a load from my mind and I do feel that it is gone for ever; because you are so wise and so good that I believe every word that you say. And I will do *everything* you tell me; and you have made me happier than I have been ever since that dreadful day at ——, but I will not speak of the past.

'I have written to him to say it was a mistake about my not seeing him again, and I can really see him whenever he likes. I don't know what he will think of me for first writing one thing and then the other. But I felt that I could not sleep

to-night without writing to say I did not at present mean what I had written before.'

And now once more Marian's reports came in with fulness and regularity; and once more Vivien experienced fluctuations of hope and fear, an unceasing excitement, an ever-growing anxiety for the next report.

'On Sunday,' said Marian, 'we dined again at the dear old Mentone and he told me a lot more about himself. There is a splendid appointment that he believes he might get. It is to be government doctor in one of the West Indian Islands, and he says sometimes he feels tempted now to try to get it and give up all his ambition and go right away from everything. He said in six weeks the chance would be gone but he knew it was a good chance. He said he told you about it, and you advised him not to give up his ambition but stay here. Oh Vi when I heard that I blessed you, because of course if he was appointed and went away I should never see him again. We did not stay very long after dinner because he was so tired and I told him I was tired too, although really I would have liked to sit there till they came to turn us out. He works so dreadfully hard all day, and even at night he is called out sometimes two or three times before morning.

'Oh Vi I was happy when I went home and thought about it. Because he would not have talked so openly and freely about himself unless he had liked me just a little—only as a friend. But I do believe he must have felt that I was sympathetic to him or he would not have done it. He has never done it so much before.'

That was a typically hopeful report, but the reports which soon followed were full of gloom and depression. Poor Marian, laying her heart bare for inspection, reported that there had been an excursion to the Crystal Palace and some more football.

'He has shown me quite plainly that he could never, never care for me. In a dozen different ways he shows it every time I see him. . . .

'In the train he never wants to sit next me, but always opposite. We had corner seats but when the other people came in he did not move. If he did not dislike me, surely he would come and sit by my side rather than let me be next to strangers?

'At the football there was such a crowd that he had to take my arm to help me through, but the very first moment he could he dropped it as though he did not like having the trouble of doing it. Oh Vi, if he cared for me the least little bit in the world he might have held my arm until we got clear of the

crowd. He might have waited a little longer for me to release him from his trouble. . . .'

And again:—

'I will not go on with it. It can only make me miserable. I am just a fool to believe he could ever care for me and let myself care for him as much as I do. It only makes me miserable now all the time. . . .

'. . . We were alone in the train and all at once he began about my eyes. He said some one had told him that I had extraordinary blue eyes, and I knew that was you. And he leaned forward and looked at me, and said he had never properly seen how blue my eyes were. Oh Vi, when he talked like that I thought it must mean that he did really and truly care for me. Then for the very first time he changed his seat and sat beside me and I sat looking out of the window, but I felt sure he was going to take my hand. But he did not. He told me to turn round so that he could see my eyes. And I did so and he looked at me, and oh Vi my face must have told him what I felt. I thought he was going to take me in his arms and kiss me. But he did not. He went back to his seat opposite and he said my eyes were blue, and he began to talk at once about Wandsworth Common that we were passing. I could hardly answer. I looked out of the window and I thought I must burst out crying.

'Oh Vi it was not shyness that made him go back and sit opposite again. It was simply that he did not like my eyes and he did not like me. . . .'

Marian's too conscientious self-analysis in some of the reports was painful to read. Poor facile Marian!

Then there was a silence: a long interval without any report. Then came a tremendous packet: an almost bursting envelope stuffed with closely written sheets. Vivien's heart beat fast as she turned the leaves to find the opening lines, and the fluctuations of hope and fear were as waves rolling one into another. Wherever she cast her eyes upon the pages of this letter, they were met with 'Oh Vi's.' Were they exclamations of joy or grief?

'Oh Vi'—at last the beginning had been discovered. 'Oh Vi, he has asked me to be his wife.'

Vivien's delight was so great that for a long time she could read no more. Success! Her own swift thought turned into solid fact; the scene planned in her brain acted on the stage of life—she was tasting the rapture that is only given to creators. From void and chaos she had built order and peace. At last she had done one useful thing in her useless existence. Hence-

forth, come weal or woe, she would have this to remember and hold fast: the friend she loved had called to her for help and she had answered the pitiful cry.

'Oh Vi when he said it I felt I must go down on my knees and tell him I would not be his wife but I would just be his servant and he might take me home with him then and there and set me to scrub the floors and clean the saucepans that very minute. . . . Then I told him what you said I should, and he said if I had suffered disappointment so had he and that would not prevent us being very happy after all and ought to make us all the fonder of one another. He did not ask a single question more. . . . He told me it was not that he had forgotten you or was one who easily changed his mind. But he said if he had never fallen in love with you he would never have fallen in love with me. And oh Vi he really and truly is in love with me now. He shows it in *every* way—by a thousand signs.'

There was much of admiration for the lover and much of gratitude to the friend. Skipping whole pages, reading here and there, Vivien hurried through the glorious budget. The declaration, it seemed, had occurred a week ago, and since then Marian had been a dweller in dreamland, unable to write letters, unable to do her shop-work properly, only able to count the minutes to the next interview with the loved one.

'. . . So this is what he has decided in the end. He will use every endeavour to get the appointment and he does count on getting it. At the hospital they tell him it's as good as his. And we are to be married very soon before the registrar. My dear does not want the fuss of church and friends and presents. He only wants me, to sail away with half across the world. Then in a few years he says he will come back and settle at Hawkridge and take over his uncle's practice. And oh Vi if you are still with Lady Colwyn how lovely that would be!'

XXIX

'AS I thought,' said Lady Colwyn. 'They have lost my boy. I knew it would come to that.'

She had been reading a letter, and as she laid it upon the little table by her side, she spoke with a sort of proud contentment in the accuracy of her prognostication.

'Miss Shelton, Helensburgh has sent in his papers. I knew that would be the end of it. A year ago I wrote to the Commander-in-chief telling him it was what would happen if they were not careful, and now they have lost him.'

Before long the loss was officially recorded in the public press. 'Lieutenant the Earl of Helensburgh resigns his commission,' etc. Then, in the weeks that followed, there were many unofficial paragraphs in various journals, whereby the world at large were kept informed of the acts and intentions of this most important young nobleman.

'It is understood that Lord Helensburgh is about to enter the arena of politics. As the son of a famous father, if for no other reason, Lord Helensburgh will be welcomed,' etc. etc.

He would never again wear that too splendid uniform of the sumptuous corps; he would subside into the comparatively dull and sedate robes of velvet and ermine; if he sat for another picture he would have to hold a coronet instead of a helmet in his hand: he was laying aside the pretty outward trappings, and he was about to do the great things promised by Mr. Frensham.

'Lord Helensburgh will reside for a considerable portion of the year at Frensham House,' said the journalists. 'Frensham is a stately and immense building of the period of the Regency. The old house, that dated from the days of James the First, was destroyed by fire in 1810,' etc. etc.

'Lord Helensburgh is hunting from Hawkridge,' said another paragraph.

And then came intelligence of a circumstance which may have caused no undue excitement in London, but which created a very considerable stir in the great house at Hawkridge.

'Lord Helensburgh while hunting near Tellhurst yesterday

was thrown from his horse and suffered such injuries that Mr. Bryce Phillips was summoned by special train.'

But in truth the injuries were of the slightest, and the famous London surgeon, with the assistance of Dr. James, was able at once to allay the anxiety of Lady Colwyn; and very soon the confusion that the accident had spread among all ranks of the household abated, and dignified quiet again reigned.

One of the fingers of the right hand had been crushed; two others were cut, but not deeply; wrist muscles and muscles of the forearm had been strained—really that was all. Mr. Bryce Phillips would not come down again. Rest, nature, and Dr. James would complete the cure.

'Now I hope you are satisfied, granny,' said the patient, when another special train had carried away the famous Mr. Phillips. 'I believe the old boy thought we were out of our senses to make such a fuss about nothing.'

The young man, with his bandaged hand in a sling, was standing before the fire; and the lady-in-waiting, sitting silent and observant, liked him for making so light of his tumble and liked him for speaking to his granny so kindly. He had protested against all the fuss, but he had supported it with a good grace; and he spoke now very gently—smiling at the old lady affectionately, grateful to her for the evidences of her regard even though they might be boring.

'Tell me exactly how it happened,' said Lady Colwyn.

Then my lord explained the cause of the catastrophe. Vivien, listening attentively, found it no easy matter to understand: while Lady Colwyn, intent and frowning, appeared to grasp every detail.

It seemed that my lord's second horse, full of pride as one lately arrived from Leicestershire, was imbued that afternoon with a soaring ambition and thought he could 'fly' everything.

'And that,' said Lady Colwyn sternly, 'cannot be done with our banks.'

'No. Well, I suppose we were both a bit tired of pottering about, and when we *did* get away we meant going.'

'Yes,' said Lady Colwyn resolutely, and she settled herself squarely in her chair.

'Wonderful thing, scent, granny. Hounds hadn't been able to hunt a yard till four o'clock—messing about in the woods, you know, all day long—and then in a moment a scent you could hang your hat on. They came streaming out of Craddock Bottom in really grand style, and I thought I was in for a treat.'

'But you had to race for your place,' said Lady Colwyn severely.

'Not a bit of it,' and he laughed. 'I was right on their backs. I 'd got my place—nothing to do but hold it.'

'Yes?' and the old lady's eyes flashed, and she sat well back in her chair, and looked as though it would have to be something very big that should turn her now.

'Well then—down we came. A rotten little bank no higher than your work-table—the ditch to you—and I never troubled to steady him.'

'Then the horse was to blame,' said Lady Colwyn very severely. 'If it was a small fence your horse should not have blundered.'

'Poor beggar, he couldn't help himself. Well, perhaps I've exaggerated the smallness. Yes, there was a rail on the bank. And, don't you see, it was the pace we were going that turned us over.'

Then it seemed that when, after rolling together in the most friendly fashion about the next field, he and his four-footed friend at last got up, my lord's hand had been trodden on.

'Well, I am glad,' said Lady Colwyn, 'that your horse was not to blame,' and her tone seemed to add: 'Death would have been a light penalty had he been at fault. Dig a grave, fetch a gun for the horse that can't keep on its legs when my lord is on its back.'

But there came from the stern old dame none of those words of caution that one might perhaps have expected. 'Do be more careful another time,' 'Let this be a lesson,' etc. All that he did was right. And in the hunting-field, as everywhere else, he must lead: for him there could be only one place—the first.

He was perceptibly ruffled next day when reading about himself in the newspapers.

'What stupid asses they are,' he said to Miss Shelton—'these fellows who write for the newspapers. Stupid asses always say you were thrown from your horse.'

'But you were, weren't you?'

'No. I took a toss, of course—because we both came down That's not being thrown. These fellows all seem to have seen some one kicked off a donkey on Ramsgate sands and they think that's what happens out hunting.'

It was pleasant to granny to have the young man under her eyes day after day, and perhaps unconsciously she hoped that the cure of the maimed hand might not be too speedy. Had she been conscious of the thought, she would have sternly

crushed it. She would not have him as an unwilling prisoner, but she urged him to stay if he could.

On the whole, not without hesitation, he thought he could and would. But there were difficulties. There was his correspondence—business letters fast accumulating—and his writing hand useless. He thought he would send for some Mr. Jefferies, who, it seemed, was a secretary. Then he thought he could not do so, because this Mr. Jefferies was busy at Cinderford.

'There is Mr. Frensham.'

'Oh yes. I've set old Henry to work already. He's always such a brick—swears he likes it. But I am afraid I shall give him more than he can swallow.'

'Miss Shelton, I am sure, will be glad to help you.'

He laughed as he looked across to the lady-in-waiting and then back to his granny.

'Will you lend me Miss Shelton? That's awfully good of you, granny. But what does Miss Shelton say?'

Miss Shelton said, as her employer had already said for her, that she would be glad if she could be of any assistance.

Thus, in this pleasant springtide of the year, Vivien found herself with more work to do than was usual. But she liked work and felt happy in making herself really useful. With the kind spring sunlight it had always seemed to her that everything and everybody smiled upon her. The happiness of her dear Marian overflowed into endless sheets of notepaper whenever she could steal an hour to write to her dearest Vi. Dr. James was genial and cordial, happy and contented. He shook Vivien's hand and pressed it and shook it again, in telling her with a laugh that Dr. Quinlan's happiness had after all come through her, although not in a manner that any one could have anticipated. Even Lady Colwyn smiled upon her once, in approval, when the grandson praised her performance of these new secretarial duties. In the gardens and the woods the birds were singing their spring songs of happiness, and really it seemed that the kind west winds had blown a wave of tranquil happiness right across the plain into the windows of the great house.

For an hour or two in the morning, and again in the afternoon after tea, she was on duty in the library. She sat at one table, Mr. Frensham at another; and the young man walked about, controlling, instructing, dictating. Mr. Benson, his valet, brought in morocco-covered boxes that seemed to her worthy of a prime minister at least. The boxes had trays, and in these were packed folded letters and papers; then leather

cases with straps and buckles and locks were put on the boxes and they were sent away in charge of some other servant; and next day more boxes arrived. Over tables and chairs, in all directions, the young man's accumulating correspondence poured forth—and by this voluminous stream was shown the young man's magnificence. He might in himself have been a Government office, a thriving bank with many branches, a small town, several small towns. Reports from stewards, agents, bailiffs, solicitors—the business of the different houses and estates—all to be sorted, docketed, packed up again—thus the stream flowed through the quiet library, leaving as detritus ever-increasing mounds of leases, agreements, etc., that must wait for execution until my lord's right hand was again able to manipulate a pen.

'You see,' he said to her. 'I'm not quite such an idle dog as you thought, eh? Plenty to do in my trivial life, you see—' and he laughed. 'Great luck my being able to borrow you from granny.'

He considered this a joke, and was always returning to it.

'I say, granny never said how long the loan was to last. When are you to be paid back?'

He had taken his hand from the sling and was examining the damaged finger.

'I can bend it, you see. I believe I could write now if I tried. It's rather mean borrowing you if I could do the work myself.'

Mr. Frensham worked all day long, and gradually the work was reduced: the stream began to slacken and dwindle. Mr. Jefferies had returned from Cinderford and was hard at work in London acting as a sluice-gate. Fewer and fewer of the morocco-covered boxes came down to Hawkridge. And as the work grew less, the talk grew more. Soon it seemed there would be much more talk than work.

At first Vivien liked the work better than the talk. Just at first there was constraint and discomfort in talking to him, and she hoped that Mr. Frensham would not leave them alone. Two matters made her uncomfortable. For the first few mornings she was in dread that he would command her to write for him to Mrs. Arncliffe. But he did not set her this odious task. Either Mr. Frensham was intrusted with such communications, or my lord, disobeying the doctor's orders, had himself scrawled some lines for the wicked syren. It could hardly be supposed that he was not communicating with his enchantress. The other troublesome thought was the dog-collar. What would he say about that? The glittering dog-collar was a distressing memory.

'How is Pincher?'

He asked the question suddenly, just as, for the first time, Mr. Frensham was about to leave them alone.

'My dog is very well thank you'; and, as she knew would happen, the moment Mr. Frensham shut the door behind him, the young man spoke of his gift.

'I say. I'm sorry you didn't care for that collar. I chose it myself—You seemed to think he ought to have a pretty collar so I tried to pick out a pretty one.'

'You were too successful.'

'If at first you don't succeed, try, try, and try again'—and he sat at the other side of the table, watching her face and laughing good humouredly, as though much amused with some thought that he had not expressed in words.

'I quite understood your reason for sending it back—you know, what you said about Pincher getting stolen. But you might have kept it for him to wear indoors.'

'He is not allowed to come indoors.'

That was all that was ever said about the collar; and Vivien, who had stored in her mind certain words of scornful reproach for some such occasion as this, was glad that they had not been uttered, and was glad, too, that he had not seemed angry or resentful. Henceforth she could enjoy making herself useful without any nervous feeling that explanation and self-assertion lay before her.

As well as the letters to be written, there were letters to be copied, also business papers concerning which careful notes should be taken before the originals were sent away, and on some days Mr. Frensham was still busily occupied with this class of work and was glad to accept Vivien's aid when her own light task was done.

It seemed, as the two amateur secretaries sat scribbling when my lord had departed from the library, that he had left his picture in command. Every time she looked up, she met the watchful eyes. And when Mr. Frensham began to talk about the young man, the picture seemed to be listening attentively. This absurd impression was so strong sometimes that she wished Mr. Frensham would find something else to talk about. Instinctively, she dropped her voice in answering. It was impossible to speak openly beneath the absorbed scrutiny of the painted eyes.

'Astonishing head for business,' said the old librarian. 'Carries it all in his head—just like her ladyship—but never allows anything to escape him. Astounding grasp—for so young a man—like his father.'

'Isn't it a pity,' asked Vivien, almost in a whisper, after a glance at the picture, 'that he has left the army?'

'No,' said Mr. Frensham decisively. 'Very wise of him. Only waste of time. More valuable to the state in the senate than the camp,' and he rubbed his hands. 'Do great things now—take up his father's position—'

Then he told Vivien of how all the path to political fame would be open to this fortunate young man—all smoothed and prepared, every obstacle carefully removed. He would move the address to the Queen's speech in the Lords next session. That would be his *début*. And all in the gilded chamber would henceforth lend attentive ears to everything he might say. 'Astonishing compliments' he had already received from those in power: this invitation about moving the address was only one out of many. 'And depend upon it, he'll astonish them. Stores of knowledge to draw upon, and now that he's free of the worry of the regiment he'll open his mind more and more every day—He's doing it now—reads at night in here—almost every night.'

Then, passing from the brilliant future, Mr. Frensham extolled the young man for his numerous present virtues. He was kind and considerate, full of fun, yet never making ill-natured jokes.

'Like sunshine in the house. That's what her ladyship feels. Never says it, but impossible not to feel it. The servants say so. His own servants would go through fire and water for him. Always grateful for the smallest kindness—That's one of the great secrets of life, miss—gratitude for kindness. Very rare.'

The young man, it appeared, was grateful to Mr. Frensham and grateful to Vivien for what they were doing for him. 'He told me so himself. Paid you astonishing compliments, miss, for the clever way you've done it.'

'Wonderful patience,' said Mr. Frensham another time. 'Very irksome to be confined here, compelled to do as the doctor tells him.'

'But he doesn't do what the doctor tells him,' said Vivien 'He will go out riding. Dr. James said that was dangerous, and of course it must be.'

Mr. Frensham shrugged his shoulders. He was of Lady Colwyn's opinion. All that my lord did was right. And as to danger—*That* was not a consideration that could in any circumstances be advanced as a check to the free action of a St. Keverne.

'Very fine horseman, you know, miss. Ride with one hand as well as two.'

My lord would ride. With his right arm tied up, he would

go hacking on his fiery, prancing, Leicestershire horses. Vivien had met him in the park, and he had forced his curveting steed to walk by her side for a little way—a very little way, until she had begged him to allow the insanely excitable beast to carry him onward and expend its energy in movement. Imp the dog had disgraced himself by barking at and frightening or enraging the horse. She did not know what passion ruled in the equine mind, but, while she vainly called her dog, she was seized with panic. In spite of all that he had told her about the newspaper correspondents and Ramsgate sands, she quite expected to see him once more thrown from his horse. Oh if such a catastrophe had occurred! Dig a grave for Miss Shelton and her wicked dog and let them bury themselves together and hide their disgrace for ever more! There was no disaster; but she was quite, quite sure that my lord's one-arm-riding was *very* dangerous.

It was difficult, even if one tried, to resist the power that the fairies had given at his christening to this young nobleman. He had been granted the power of spreading about him an atmosphere of good-fellowship and friendly ease, and among the dull old books he used the power day after day. Mr. Frensham never tried to resist the power, and very soon Vivien ceased to try. Very soon she found the talk as pleasant as the work. There was daylight after tea-time now, and they could sit by the windows and write while the shadows gathered, until the rows of books lost themselves in darkness and the big room seemed to contract behind the writers till it closed them in with grey shadow-walls. But at this hour he would always come in, make them cease work, forbid them to turn on the electric light, and command them to talk. My lord, it seemed, was always bored at dusk and had to be amused.

They talked in the twilight, of everything—a debating society of three in which it was not always easy to obtain a fair hearing. Mr. Frensham was always being left behind. He would, as a good librarian, fall back upon his shelves for support. But, nearly always, by the time that he had brought up his reinforcements, laid the volume open on the table, and pointed to a passage that should overcome further resistance, the battle had rolled far away.

'That's right, Henry,' said my lord. 'You were right and I was wrong, but we are talking of something else now.'

No one could be more inconsecutive than Mr. Frensham or more rapid in springing from one uncompleted idea to another, and had he left his books alone he could have kept up very nicely. It was only the books that made him lag behind.

They talked of books, but did not require the books themselves. They talked of life—of philosophy, and even of poetry.

My lord's taste in poetry was entirely undeveloped. He shocked her by pooh-poohing in one block all the English poets from Lord Byron to Mr. Kipling. Lord Tennyson was an old twaddler.

'Oh Mr. Frensham, did you hear that?'

But Mr. Frensham had gone, and she did battle for Tennyson alone. Mr. Frensham had slipped like a ghost through the shadow-wall and the real wall, and unlike a ghost was enjoying a late tea somewhere behind the unbroken lines of book shelves.

They stood in one of the windows, and, while they argued and contradicted each other, looked down into the darkening garden and away across the rose-tinted plain to the soft red fire of the western sky.

'What a ripping evening!' he said, interrupting her. 'What a ripping evening. . . . Now what more can a poet say?—A long rigmarole about the sun going down and the trees saying they were sorry, and the earth being too happy to go to bed—rambling on for a week about it?'

'That shows how little you know of the matter. What the good poets do, is to say it all with extraordinary shortness—to give you the impression in only a very few words.'

'They couldn't say it shorter than I did. I said it was ripping.'

'But they give some added thought—'

'Well, I could do that. It's a ripping evening and it will be a fine day to-morrow.'

And he laughed as though he had made a really good joke; and made her laugh also. No one could maintain that he was a wit or ever said anything worth remembering: he was childish in his conception of humour, but he forced childish unthinking mirth: he made one feel as a child talking with a child, and all children love the sound of laughter.

They were, however, chattering gravely and confidentially when Mr. Frensham returned. Entering silently, as a ghost through the wall, he reopened his secret door and gently banged it to give notice that they were no longer alone. But they were only talking about the Stonehavens, and immediately Mr. Frensham was taken into the confidence.

'They're not coming this year—the Stonehavens,' said my lord sadly. 'They've gone to Cannes. Poor Lady Stonehaven is very ill.'

'Sorry to hear that,' said Mr. Frensham. 'He always came in here.'

'Yes, I am afraid it will be a long time before you see him in here again. I am afraid she is dying.'

He spoke very sadly and he laughed no more. He was sympathetic, and could realise even at a distance the sorrow of the great Scottish lord. He had told Vivien how this poor lady had been assailed by insidious disease, of how all the greatest doctors in the land had been powerless to avert the coming doom, and of how her husband had borne the blow with a splendid old-world fortitude: had shielded his loved one from the knowledge of the truth, had carried her away to die with his brave staunch hand in hers, down there in the sunshine among the flowers.

Lady Colwyn had never spoken of these things to her lady-in-waiting.

He was considerate in small matters.

Two or three times he condescended to drive of an afternoon with his granny.

'If you 'll take me, I 'll come with you to-day.'

'Will you, Harry? That will be very nice,' said the old lady. 'Then I will tell Miss Shelton that she will not be wanted.'

'Oh no, don't do that—don't let me deprive Miss Shelton of her drive.'

'Miss Shelton is fond of walking. She can go for a walk.'

'Oh no. Please let her come. It would make me uncomfortable to think that I had prevented her going with you. It 's such a hateful thing to let people know they are not wanted.'

This was really considerate: as Miss Shelton must have agreed had she heard the discussion.

After one of these drives, he took Miss Shelton through a part of the gardens that she had never inspected before. Just to fill in time before tea, he persuaded her to go with him to the hothouses and see how Mr. Ferguson was getting on.

Lady Colwyn had already passed through the great hall when this invitation was issued; but Mrs. Mapleton, following her mistress with shawls and wraps, heard the invitation and made certain catlike sounds as she went up the big staircase.

There were gardeners in blue aprons busily engaged in and about all the glass houses, and by a mysterious telegraphy from gardener to gardener Mr. Ferguson was quickly apprised of the honour that was being done him. Swiftly the great man hastened to welcome the august visitor to his own particular province of the realm. He showed them everything and although he did not say My garden, My succession houses, My

orchid houses, My orchard houses, his manner was completely that of an urbane proprietor of all that he had to show.

He had a small stable of his own that contained the garden horses, and a range of adjacent buildings wherein reposed the huge garden rollers, the wagons, carts and trucks and trollies for the service of the garden only. There were vast stone tanks with wonderful thermometers to register the temperature of the standing water and of the moving air, to mark dew point, etc. etc., barometers, hydrometers, hygrometers: unheard-of scientific instruments, sensitive and delicate beyond imagination, to give Mr. Ferguson hourly hints in his far-seeing government of his domain. In one building there was a room like a chemist's shop, a room like a seedsman's establishment conducting business on a large scale, and a box-room that might have been the packing department of a successful manufactory. Here, in these hundreds of boxes, stuffed with the new cotton wool that lay waiting in dozens of deep drawers, were packed all the fruit and flowers that her ladyship sent to the local and the London hospitals. It was like going behind the scenes of the garden world.

As they passed through the endless greenhouses, Mr. Ferguson cut a choice blossom here and there, picking perfect blooms as specimens of his achievement; and, as they passed out into the open air once more, he presented the representative bouquet to Miss Shelton.

'There, miss,' said Mr. Ferguson with a smile and a very fine manner. 'We'll just be judged by that. His lordship loves his joke and will be teasing me, but there's no gardens in the kingdom that can beat us.'

My lord, throughout their visit, had been teasing Mr. Ferguson, but it was plain that the dignified Scotchman enjoyed being teased. Gardeners, said my lord, never learned anything and never forgot anything. All the gardeners' art had been built up by the work of amateurs. The professionals never originated, and so on. Everything had been taught them by people who had taken up gardening just for fun—late in life generally—when there was nothing else they could do. He promised Mr. Ferguson, if they both lived long enough, to prove his words by his own performance.

'I'm thinking we'll have to wait a long while for that my lord,' said Mr. Ferguson. He really was splendid, Mr. Ferguson—the governor of a province, walking with the young king and future emperor.

He walked with them through archways and by long brick walls until they came out of the business side into the decorative

side of the garden, and the older part of the great house lay before them. In the orangery, which he invited them to inspect, the orange trees in green tubs were ranged, like the neglected toys of giant children, out of harm's way. All day long the blue-aproned men with syringes, sponges, and cloths had been cleaning the dingy green leaves, and polishing the small green balls that were going to be yellow oranges. Already, some of the tubs had been painted for the season. Ere very long, the trees would come creeping forth on their trollies amidst a small army of blue aprons, to take up their summer stations along the terraces. And here, outside the orangery, ancient but not forgotten empirical effort enabled Vivien to score a point as an expert.

'Now, miss,' said Mr. Ferguson. 'Will you guess the age of these trees? They were raised here where they stand now. We have all their history in the garden-book.'

'How were they raised? From pips?'

'*Pips?* No miss. Just cuttings grafted on to straight stocks. What age would you give them? His lordship knows.'

Vivien looked at the trees very attentively. Her mind had travelled back a long way and there was sadness in her voice as she answered.

'I should say—roughly—four or five hundred years.'

'And not a bad guess,' said Mr. Ferguson. 'But you 're over the mark, miss. Two hundred years.'

Lord Helensburgh laughed heartily.

'Sold again, Ferguson. You thought Miss Shelton would say last September. I told you the amateurs knew all about it.'

As they passed on through the clipt yew hedges and came out beneath the staring windows, unseen eyes watched them. My lord had taken the lady-in-waiting to the hot-houses, and with his own injured hand had picked her a nosegay. Behind the baize doors, on stone landings, up and down stone stairs, the tidings flashed. Growling laughter of hidden men, squealing laughter of hidden women: half the vast household watching and making merry.

'Here. Come here, I tell you, and see for yourself. There they go. She 's smelling of the flowers and thanking him. Oh me lord 'ow you do go on! 'Ow can you say sich things? There, she 's a-coming in. So long, me lord, till we meets agin in the libery.'

One evening, when Lady Colwyn had retired to rest somewhat earlier than usual, Miss Shelton was unexpectedly called upon for secretarial work. She met the young man in the

corridor, and, with apologies for troubling her, he asked her to come to the library and help him.

'Is it something important?' she asked.

'Yes. Very important. But of course if you are tired—'

'Oh no, I'm not tired,' and obediently she went dowstairs and took her place at the table in the library.

'Now. I am ready.'

He stood looking at her and smiled, but did not on his side seem ready to begin.

'It is a letter, isn't it?' she said, waiting with her paper spread and her pen poised.

'A letter? Oh yes. Immediate, important, urgent, and strictly private. Sure you are ready?'

'Yes. No—one moment.'

A horrid thought had come to her. Was he, after all, about to make her write to Mrs. Arncliffe?

'Now. Are you ready, or are you not?'

'Yes. I am ready now.'

Then he began to dictate.

'Lord Helensburgh regrets'—It was in the third person: then all was well. Her pen scraped cheerfully upon the thick paper—

'Lord Helensburgh regrets—got that down?—regrets he has been compelled to summon assistance in his solitude. Lord Helensburgh, being desirous of company and badly wanting some one to talk to, has been driven to resort to artifice—'

Then she laid down her pen, and the young man stood watching her face and laughing.

'Oh, how silly you are.'

'Am silly? But it's quite true. Oh don't go. Do stop and talk to me.'

'No, I can't. I was really very tired. I only came because you said it was important.'

'It *is* important—most important to me. Do stop and talk—or play me at cards. My hand's quite well enough to play Old Maid.'

With childish eagerness he pleaded for companionship. It was only half-past ten. How could one be expected to keep granny's hours and go to bed at half-past ten? He would not be able to sleep unless he had a little talk. He could not sleep last night, or the night before. He could not read any more, because reading excited him if he had too much of it.

He made her laugh, while she tore up the unfinished letter, by an imitation of Mr. Frensham.

'The dear old chap makes my head go round and round after

I have been listening to him for an hour. He sat with me last night till two o'clock'; and then he gave a really clever imitation of the old librarian's disconnected conversation: inventing ridiculous things which yet sounded exactly like the sort of things that Mr. Frensham would really say.

With silly schoolboy talk he detained her. It was at least half an hour before he allowed her to go. On the stairs outside the library, she met Mrs. Mapleton with a book in her hand.

'You left it in her ladyship's room,' said Mrs. Mapleton, 'and knowing it was the book you was reading I took it to your room. But you wasn't there, so thinking you might be in the library I was bringing it down again.'

The injured hand was well now; all leases and agreements could now be signed without delay; Miss Shelton's extra work had come to an end; but still my lord lingered at Hawkridge. It was incomparably the longest visit that he had paid his granny since his boyhood. Granny was enchanted.

He talked to her of his plans. He was, he said, now arranging the scheme of his future existence. He thought that this year he would charter a yacht and spend the summer afloat in northern waters—the fiords, Iceland, and a peep at the great ice-fields. Then in the autumn he would go on a tour of inspection of the Empire, carefully examine India, the Australian colonies, and South Africa perhaps. He would look into this stupid wrangle between the Uitlanders and the Boers: see for himself what the truth was as to the disastrous *sequelæ* of that tom-fool raid, etc. Then, next February, home again to make his parliamentary *début*!

It was, he said, a great treat to be quiet down here for a little while—an immense relief after his regimental duties: a breathing space in his hurried life.

'That is very nice, Harry,' said Lady Colwyn.

She was enchanted by her grandson's wisdom, enchanted to think that he was contented in these peaceful days at Hawkridge.

Lounging about the gardens with Miss Shelton after breakfast, or strolling with her to the stables when she went to see her dog, he opened his mind as frankly to her as to her employer. She also approved of the young man's wise plans. There was nothing better than making oneself really useful: it was a grand thing to do one useful piece of work in the world. In his position, if only he would be serious and act as wisely as he talked, he might hope to do many, many useful things. And the harder he worked, the happier he would be. All this, she modestly

added, had been far better expressed by the late Mr. Carlyle, in his splendid doctrine of work that ran as the deep undercurrent beneath the surface of all of his very extensive rivers of ink. And, as bearing out Mr. Carlyle's advice, one might with propriety always recall the homely proverbial saying that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do.

'Does he really?' said my lord, smiling at her. 'That's very kind of the old gentleman, I am sure.'

And always as they passed before the blank face of the great house, unseen eyes watched them. Past the Italian front, behind stone mullions and latticed panes of the old building, watchers in deep windows followed them with their eyes as they sauntered by—Mr. Frensham in the library, Dr. James waiting for audience, Mrs. Mapleton high up near the crumbling battlements, Mrs. Roberts low down in that parlour beyond the sunk garden—many servants on landings and stairs.

A most assiduous prowling watcher was Mrs. Mapleton. Nothing was too insignificant for her notice: as unpaid amateur detective she shirked neither labour nor fatigue. Throughout my lord's visit she was very busy.

Once—when my lady and her companion were out driving—Mrs. Garnet the housekeeper, with an upper housemaid acting as A.D.C. was going her rounds, and she surprised Mrs. Mapleton in Miss Shelton's room. The faithful Mapleton was on her knees by the wastepaper-basket, and was picking over torn fragments of paper—all that was left of Miss Shelton's recent letters.

Mapleton, rising from her knees, for a moment or two looked somewhat foolish.

'May I ask,' said Mrs. Garnet the housekeeper, with much indignation, 'what you are doing and by whose orders you come into the bedrooms under my charge?'

'As to your inquiries,' said Mapleton, recovering her self-possession, 'I come in here with one of Miss Shelton's books as she left behind her. And as to your charge, do you see that basket? Very tidy that looks I'm sure. Not cleared out at half-past three in the afternoon.'

'Whatever's in that basket,' cried the housemaid, ''as been put there since the morning. I know my place, thank you Mrs. Mapleton.'

'You do not,' said Mrs. Garnet, 'taking the word out of my mouth and answering of her in my presence. I ask you, Mrs. Mapleton: By whose orders you come prying in my bedrooms and interfering with me?'

'You'll find out all about the orders,' said Mrs. Mapleton,

'precious soon if you give me any of your cheek. You'll get some orders you'll remember for a precious long time,' etc.

Thus the women wrangled until, with further threats, Mrs. Mapleton withdrew, leaving the housekeeper trembling from indignation. All the menial world hated the upstart Mapleton; she had no willing aids in her detective investigations: she worked alone.

By night as well as by day it was Mrs. Mapleton's habit to prowl. She, who was feared by all, herself knew fear. She had a horror of fire. As an infant she had been carried out of a burning house, and always she dreaded that this would be the end of the great house—rolling, choking smoke, roaring flame, and the crash of falling floors. When she read of another of the splendid country mansions burnt to the ground between dusk and dawn, she, who could make others tremble, trembled herself. It was this horror that brought her forth, creeping and sniffing and listening about the big corridors, when all the household slept. There was a night watchman of course, but sleep might overcome him. He might be suffocated ere he could give the alarm. The horror used to wake her, and then for her sleep was no longer possible until she had prowled, and sniffed to catch the odour of burning curtains and paint and woodwork.

One night, creeping like a cat about the silent corridors, she found the door of my lord's room open. Pushing it after a while with catlike softness, she made sure that my lord was not in his room. A wood fire was burning: my lord's room was empty. A discovery! A curious discovery! Softly creeping, pausing and waiting when boards creaked, often stopping to listen, she moved about the house. On her knees outside Vivien's room, she listened intently. But she knew that the big mahogany doors were well fitted, shutting tight and close, holding secrets jealously, permitting no sounds to pass through their noble thickness. Not a sound now to reward the patience of the listener, who would, had she dared, have waited till dawn. Then more creeping, back along the great corridor, visiting and re-visiting that still open door. My lord not returned to his room yet! Had she dared, she would gladly have waited hidden behind a door of one of the empty rooms and watched until daylight broke.

It was a pity that Mrs. Mapleton worked alone. My lord, who could not sleep, was in the library; but there was no one to tell Mrs. Mapleton this. Had she and Mr. Frensham been friends, he would have taken pleasure in telling her how he made up the fire every night, left a light burning, and how night after night my lord, who was suffering from persistent insomnia,

came down to the library to read because he could not sleep. But, as it was, no one would give Mrs. Mapleton information on any subject if he could help doing so.

In this case perhaps no one but Mr. Frensham knew anything about the matter. For here was a peculiarity of the great house. It was like a town—everything and nothing was known: the whispered word flew round, but a man might be dying and no one would know of it.

Mrs. Mapleton, meeting Mr. Benson the valet, bade him good morning very graciously, and, holding him in conversation, sought for surer knowledge.

His lordship restless, etc. At last she asked her question.

'Why does his lordship leave his room at night?'

'In pursuit of business or sport I presume,' said the man grossly. 'Anyways I ain't 'is wet nurse. I forget if you was, by the way—'

They will not permit it—these high-fed servants. No interference. It is the point of honour in the menial world—rather death than that.

Mrs. Mapleton waddled off, making those catlike sounds again. 'Impident dog. Oh miauw: I'll serve him out before I've done with him,' etc.

'Henry,' said my lord abruptly, 'I think I am making an ass of myself hanging about down here. I don't believe the air of this place agrees with me.'

Mr. Frensham seemed distressed by this abrupt announcement.

'Terrible thing, sleeplessness,' he said sympathetically. 'Great trial—especially in youth—demands strongest powers of endurance. But can't be the air. Sleepy air, it's always been held.'

'Sleepy air, is it? There s something wrong with the air.'

My lord had not been talkative to-night. He had been sitting in one of the deep chairs, and had been staring gloomily into the fire that Mr. Frensham had just made up. Now, when the librarian, after taking a last look round, was about to retire, my lord suddenly seemed disposed for conversation.

'How long have I been here, Henry? A deuce of a time, haven't I?'

'Nearly six weeks. Five weeks exactly since the accident.'

'It seems a year,' and my lord got up, stretched himself. 'Anyhow, it's time I was on the move. I think I'll be off to-morrow,' and he stretched himself again and yawned. 'Yes, Ill' go up to-morrow by the mid-day train.'

Mr. Frensham was grieved to hear that the young man was leaving them.

'Don't go to bed, old chap, unless you are tired. Stay and have a jaw as this is my last night.'

Mr. Frensham was most happy to stay and talk.

'You won't see me again until the autumn. I shall come down and see granny before I go away in the autumn.'

And again he went over his plans, telling Mr. Frensham how completely he had now mapped out the next few years.

He asked Mr. Frensham to write to him occasionally, and he gave as his address the newest of the new London hotels. He supposed he might have gone to the house in Dover Street, and there were always rooms in readiness for him at the ducal house in the Square: but on the whole he thought he would be more comfortable at a hotel.

'Drop me a line now and then and tell me all the news. Tell me how you are all getting along—granny, yourself, and Miss Shelton.'

Next day there was excitement from a very early hour. My lord's servants were busily packing the innumerable leather cases. The tidings flashed in a moment throughout the great house. My lord was going by the mid-day train. And by the mid-day train my lord went—not to return until the autumn.

Hand in hand the Spirit of Sadness and the Spirit of Dulness flitted about the great corridors from which they had been banished for nearly six weeks. My lord was gone: no longer lurking, but openly advancing, they offered themselves as companions to any one who might be feeling lonely or depressed.

'You won't hear me, my lady?' said Mapleton.

'No, I will not,' said Lady Colwyn.

'Very good, my lady. It's the talk of all the house—yes and all the village or I wouldn't have—'

'Be silent. I have told you that I will not hear you.'

'Very good, my lady.'

'I believe you are faithful,' said the great lady, after a pause, when Mapleton was leaving her presence. 'But you should not be carried away by your zeal. Please remember that you must not bring me your tales of the servants' hall.'

As she sat knitting in the evening, her busy needles ceased working now and then, and she glanced at her lady-in-waiting thoughtfully.

What was it, she wondered, that Mapleton had been so anxious to tell her about Miss Shelton.

XXX

FROM London his lordship sent to Mr. Henry Frensham, as a trifling token of gratitude for kind assistance, a handsome cigar case. It was made of beaten gold; and inside, it had Mr. Frensham's address neatly engraved, and outside, it had Mr. Frensham's initials: H.F. wrought in rubies and diamonds —a ruby H. of red fire and blood, and a diamond F. of coldly sparkling dewdrops. The whole thing, in the opinion of the old librarian, formed a truly astonishing compliment: a compliment that must have been thought out and set in commission some time ago to be ready now directly my lord had gone.

To Vivien my lord sent no present. But after five days he sent her a letter. It arrived by the first post in the morning; and this is what my lord said:—

'Are you a sort of witch Vivien—like your namesake? If so, I wish I was a wizard. I do believe your spells are innocent, but you have somehow woven me into the four walls of a hollow tower (I looked that up in the book) and I am lost to life and use and name and fame.

'I am coming to ask you what you mean by it. How is Pincher?'

It was a glorious spring morning. The sunlight poured in through the open windows and dazzled her; the soft west wind blew in and took her breath away; the voices of the birds singing in the garden confused her with their noisy chorus. She sat up in bed and her lips shook and her eyes were filled with tears and her heart beat faster and faster, but she could not think. She could only read the letter again and again. My lord was not coming till the autumn—five months away. But only five days had gone, and my lord was coming back. Oh what did it mean? What could it mean?

This morning she did her work with Lady Colwyn: letters to write—more letters than usual—an endless task—while the sun climbed higher and higher towards its zenith. The gentle wind whispered to her; the birds sang to her; the woods called her; and Lady Colwyn dictated letters to her. She felt as a school-girl in school, suffering school-torments that she had forgotten. Would school never come to an end?

'What is the matter with you?' said Lady Colwyn. 'Cannot you attend? Now where is the letter from that hospital? . . . No, not that . . . very well. Read it. . . . Good. Now take up your pen,' etc.

Then, at last, she was free to take his letter, her own letter—his letter—out of doors and read it once more. The woods were calling her.

Her dog raced on in front of her, swift as a thought: sped round her in circles of delight. Her eyes were bright; her voice was tremulous, as though in sympathy with the day—with the quivering sunlight and the trembling air—as she thought of this great wonder.

What can he mean but what he says?

Oh wonder of wonders! And as she walks on, across the springing turf towards the silent woods, it is as though all the doors of her inner life are being opened, and out rush the secret emotions, thoughts, memories. All her life has been prelude to this day—a long, dull preparation—a long, long pause—waiting for the wonder that was surely coming.

First, the vague prince of her babyish dreams; then the strong dream-prince come to life, but for her only in dreams still; then the living man, breaking her dream for ever: now, at last, the miracle—life and the dream rolling into one. And she thinks of him—the comrade and the prince as one, and joy rushes through those open doors: childish, unreasoning joy, as of the birds that are singing; and joy in life sweeps into brain and blood and nerves. To live and be loved—that is all she can think of, as she springs through the happy tremulous sunbeams that pierce the tremulous gloom of the woods.

What else can you mean—my prince, oh, my prince?

He is coming to tell her. As she reads his letter, her eyes shine brighter and brighter, and she stands in the shadow of the trees and mentally sees him—the gracious, happy comrade whose voice is music and whose laughter makes the sunlight. He will tell her that he is sad away from her, happy with her; and she will tell him that she has been sad always because she might not be with him. All the pomp and the splendour has slipped from him, and he stands before her in her thought as the desired companion—the one living man on all the earth that has this power: to make her supremely happy in his company.

It is all she can think of—this golden hour of life in which they will whisper their joy in each other. It will be as though they were little children—'I like you': 'and I like you'—who

stop to join hands in a sunlit garden and then walk on with linked fingers. She has not a thought of the future. All her thought is for to-day: she has none for to-morrow.

When she came back from her walk, the great house had received unexpected tidings. A telegram, announcing that his lordship would return for one night, had surprised and delighted Lady Colwyn; a brougham had already been sent to the station; my lord would be here in time for a late luncheon.

'Helensburgh,' said Lady Colwyn welcoming him, 'this is very nice. But by what happy chance am I thus honoured?'

He was dull and bored in London, he explained; with no important engagements till to-morrow; and suddenly the idea had come to him that he might run down and spend some more quiet hours at Hawkridge.

'It seems ages since I was here,' he said, laughing. 'Granny, London is horrible just now—windy, dusty, and hateful. I longed to be down here again. I hoped you'd be glad to see me though you'd only just got rid of me.'

He talked to his grandmamma, but he looked at her lady-in-waiting.

'I felt I couldn't keep away,' and his eyes smiled at the lady-in-waiting. 'So I just jumped into the train and came back to you. I hoped you wouldn't mind.'

'Mind? What nonsense you talk,' said Lady Colwyn. 'You knew very well how delighted I should be to see you.'

He talked to his granny, but again and again he glanced at Vivien, and told her with his eyes that he was really talking to her.

He said he did not want to lunch—he had breakfasted late; but Lady Colwyn sent him away to get food.

He would not go until she had promised to take him with her for her afternoon drive. Vivien, waiting for orders, was ordered to accompany her ladyship.

Then they drove, across the hillside to Tellhurst, by the road along which the fairies had sent her to meet her prince at the ball; and she sat very silent, listening to his voice, looking at his radiant face. He talked to his granny, and now and then to her, forcing her to speak, asking her questions; and she answered him very shyly. She had nothing to say, if she might not tell him that she was happy. Tellhurst came out of its doors and bowed to the ground; women in gardens, children on bridle-paths bobbed and curtseyed; wherever they passed, men ceased working, smoking, drinking, or gossiping and made obeisance

to the carriage as it flashed by in the sunlight. Through the grey woods and over the green commons Mr. Slade drove them: where the air was full of the perfume of yellow gorse, among white-stemmed birch trees, by banks of primroses, and by tiny streams of babbling, dancing water—a long drive through dreamland and through fairyland.

Then, after tea in her ladyship's room, her prince whispered to her that she must go out with him. She was to go into the garden and wait for him near the orangery. It was more like a whispered command than a whispered request. He would stay talking to granny for a little while and then follow her.

He came to her in the golden evening sunlight, and side by side they passed swiftly through the gardens and away to the open park. The setting sun cast their long shadows before them; the soft west wind blew them along; she had the dream sensation of soaring, floating in the air, as they crossed the green turf. Once or twice he took her hand and held it, and they hurried on with linked fingers for a little while. Through the fringe of the beech woods he led her, and on to the higher ground: as though in their joyousness they must climb to the highest point ere they paused to speak of their wonderful secret, quite alone, far away from all the dull, mean world. Among the beech trees, and up the long slopes to the ridge, he talked to her and she listened, too happy to speak herself. Life and the dream had rolled into one.

'What have you done to me Vivien—to make me so fond of you? . . . First you took my sleep away; then you stole my thoughts.

'When I got to London I found you had stolen my heart also. I fetched out your old Tennyson and read about you. Who gave you the spell? What old Merlin have you ever met? . . . Did old Henry Frensham dig it out of some wicked old book and give it to you when you sat working at your philosophy? A necromancer, not a philosopher. That's what you are!'

By a white gate on the edge of the down they stopped, and, turning, looked back to the golden sky, the golden plain, the woods and the fields, and the dark old house with black roofs, and the flag a black spot against the yellow light.

'Do you know what all this means? It means that I can't live without you,' and he took her in his arms and their lips met. It was the kiss of the dream-prince: the embrace that she had felt in dreams: the soft caress that had in it neither ugliness nor shame. But she slipped from his arms in a moment, shrinking

away, and stood looking at him—lips open, eyes shining, waiting for the music of his voice.

Then he talked to her, hurrying on with quick, eager words.

'Oh Vivien—are you going to be kind to me and make me happy? . . . It's granny's fault. She should not have lent you to me. She must lend you now.'

And, with eyes looking into hers, he told her rapidly all that she must do.

She must leave granny at once—to-morrow morning. They would think out the reason she would give. But she must come to London, where he would be waiting for her. In London they would be very happy for a little while. Then, the yacht would be ready—soon, almost directly, and they would go away together. . . .

And as he talked with growing excitement, a bitterness as of death came to her. The sunlight faded; the cold wind beat upon her face; the blood in her veins that had danced for joy crept stagnant and slow. She had thought of nothing but to-day: now he was telling her about to-morrow.

'You'll do this, Vivien. You do care for me. You'll come to me, my sweet Vivien. No delay—to-morrow. I'll go up by an early train and I'll be waiting for you.'

Then he told her how happy they were going to be—no more sadness for her—love and laughter, sunshine and smiles for a long, long time. He held out his arms, waiting for her to answer him. Thus lightly he sketched the outlines of the future that she had never thought of.

'You want me to come and live with you—not as your wife of course.'

'Oh it will be years before I marry—if I ever do,' and he laughed! 'I'm not a marrying man.'

'I am not asking you to marry me, but I want to understand.'

'When I marry,' he explained, 'it is sure to be somebody I don't like—a marriage arranged for reasons of state. But don't let's talk about all that—Vivien, I swear I'll be true to you. I swear you may trust me. I swear—'

'You would give me money? You are rich—you would pay me well?'

'Vivien!'

'You value my love—you'd not grudge the price? How much did you pay Mrs. Arncliffe?'

She had forced him to expose all his thought. Her face was white, and she had asked her questions in a low, gasping voice. As she spoke, the smile left his lips and he stared at her in blank surprise. Whatever he had prepared himself for, or had

expected, the idea had never crossed his mind that she would speak of money—bargain with him. Could this be the girl that had sent him back his pretty jeweller's toy?

'You, you would pay me as well as you paid her?' she gasped.

Then, clinging to the gate, she turned from him and burst into passionate tears. With hands gripping the wooden bar, she crouched down until her forehead leant upon her writhing arms, and thus she sobbed out her misery. What had she done that fate should have marked her out to be the scorn of men? She loved him and had gloried in the belief that he loved her. Not one selfish thought had soiled her innocent delight. It was sufficient for her that he should say that his love was hers. Then he might have gone away, and if she had never seen him again, she would not have complained. He should still have been her prince. But what had she ever done that he should treat her as one lost to pride and honour and decency—a girl who must needs be willing to sell herself, a poor slave who was lucky if the buyer was pleasant of aspect and soft of speech? And, as she clung to the gate, there seemed to flow from her hope and faith and all that made life endurable: leaving to her nothing but an intolerable agony of lacerated, smarting pride.

'My darling girl, what is it? Vivien, don't, don't—I love you—do you hear? I love you more than anybody in the world.'

With his arm about her, he was trying to loosen her hands. In a low, soothing voice he whispered to her. Of course, he told her, he had made up his mind that he would never see Mrs. Arncliffe again. He did not deny anything. But henceforth there would be nobody in all the world for him but Vivien.

'Say that you love me too. Vivien I *know* you love me. Dry those pretty eyes and tell me that you love me.'

When at last she raised her head and, breaking away from his arm, stood looking at him once more, he hoped that he had succeeded in soothing her agitation.

'See,' she gasped, and with all her strength she struck herself across the mouth. 'Do you see?' As she dropped her hand the blood came from her lips in a thin red stain trickling down her chin. 'To save you trouble—what else could you do to me—to show your braveness—and your—your chivalry? So I've done it for you—to remember—for you to remember—'

Her gasping voice broke in a sob, and she turned from him, and sprang down the path towards the woods.

'Vivien!'

In a few moments he had overtaken her, and walking by her side he talked to her. His face was white and grave, and his eyes were full of pity as he looked at her cut lip and the thin

trickle of blood like a thread of red silk upon her chin. Why had she said such dreadful things? Why was she so angry? Why had she dealt herself that horrible blow?

She would not speak to him. With gasping breath she hurried on, not showing by any sign that she heard him.

'Vivien, you must listen to me. I can't let you go back like this,' and by force he stopped her, holding her hands in spite of her struggles, as Claude Stanford had held them that day in Hyde Park.

In the depths of the silent wood he held her again in his arms, using his cruel male strength against her feebleness, holding her to him by brute force while he implored her to be reasonable, to be kind and sensible, and not make him wretched by the sight of her anger and distress. And, while she struggled, she suffered a torture of shame in the thought that he was as base and as cruel to her as that other man whom she despised as the meanest of his kind.

He was saying all the things that the other man had said to her. She was not to be foolish; if she did not make him happy, she would miss the chance of great happiness for herself. It was too late, after making him love her, to draw back from inevitable consequences that surely she must have foreseen. And she really was fond of him. Whatever she might say he *knew* that she cared for him. She had shown it too plainly to deny it now.

'Then why not? Vivien, my darling—come to me. I can't live without you. Listen, don't go back to the house. Come away with me now. Come back to London to-night.' . . .

With his handkerchief he wiped the blood-stain from her white, cold face, while she writhed in his arms in her unceasing struggle to free herself. But she never spoke to him.

'Very well,' and at last he released her and side by side they walked on again. 'You know what you will make me think? . . . There is some one else—who has been more fortunate than I. You have given your love—Vivien. I am a day behind the fair? That's it—I suppose.'

And as she walked on silent, helpless, hopeless, he stabbed her with cruel words.

'But why did you pretend to care for me?'—Passionate disappointment as it rose filled his brain with poisonous fumes and made him mercilessly cruel.

'You fooled me, my pretty Vivien—on purpose? You might tell me that. Are you a schemer after all? Is that what I am to believe—that you don't love me—but you thought you 'd lead me on—just to see what came of it. Then you ought to be

gratified, not angry. I've shown you what a fool I've been. All the success is yours—I thought you were brave and fearless and generous—not a schemer—so now you can laugh at me for my folly.'

She never spoke. When they came to the old gardens he left her; and she passed on with heavy, slackening footsteps, beneath the staring Italian front, watched by the unseen eyes.

From her room she sent a pencilled note to Lady Colwyn to say that she was suffering from a headache, and to beg that she might be excused from attendance. Mrs. Mapleton, tapping at the locked doors and waiting for a long time to be admitted, conveyed a gracious message from her ladyship. Miss Shelton was excused from duty; Miss Shelton was to give such orders as seemed advisable for the alleviation of the headache; Miss Shelton was to say if Dr. James should be sent for. Miss Shelton had no orders to give.

When Mapleton had gone, she brought out again the little leather box and the two little glass tubes that she had put back in a drawer while Mapleton was waiting for admittance.

Then she sat before her dressing-table for a long time thinking, while the last of the sunlight faded and died and the grey shadows crept into the room and gathered about her in three shadow-walls. Yes, she thought, the time had come to grope with outstretched arms for the wall of the grotto and lie down among the motionless shapes that the shadows were hiding for ever.

What had Lady Augusta said exactly? A quarter of a grain in each tabloid: a dose that would not hurt a cat. But one tube full of the tabloids? Twenty of them! And five in this opened tube. If she melted the contents of the two tubes and drank the solution, surely that would be enough?—Yes. That must be enough.

Very calmly she could think now—with cold reasoned thought—of all her long, long life. How old was she? Over twenty-three. Yet in truth only a child still, with a child's heart and mind, a child's foolish hopes and fears—with a horror of the ugliness and cruelty of life which only a child should feel. She could understand it all now. To her, almost from the first dawn of intelligence, life had only been possible as a dream. All her life had been a dream, but to-day the dream had come to its conclusion. Then life must go with the dream. It had seemed in the morning sunlight that to-day was the dream-apotheosis—the sunlit glory opening out in the great sunlit arch at the end of the dark grotto. But that was a child's foolish hope.

What had she hoped for really when his letter sent the soft love-fires through her veins?

Only what a child might have thought. Her prince was coming to do her honour—not shame. Love was coming to her in car triumphal; the crown of life was to be placed on her bowed head; she was to be raised by her dream-prince and seated on the throne by his side.

And again she felt the intolerable bitterness of the truth. He had but shame to offer her.

She was to steal away secretly, as a servant who has no longer any need of a character, leaving laughter and scorn behind her; she was to go to him in his London hotel, to be pointed at and gossiped about by waiters and porters; then be his travelling companion: the lady on board the yacht, to be shown to men friends, to be hidden from their sisters and wives. That was his offer. That was life, not a dream. She was to do what Marian had done by stealth, quite openly, in the eyes of all the world—because he was a young prince and not a poor sailor, all the world might know what she had done. He would be kind to her, fond of her—for a long time, he said. A year, two years perhaps, then he would give her a princely pension—he had meant so much when he said that she might trust him—and then she might seek another companion, ask if Mr. Stanford still wanted her, or, with luck such as had come to poor Marian, find a Dr. Quinlan to marry her. All this was life, not a dream.

And she shivered as she sat in the growing darkness. Why should she fear? What had she to live for? To-night life and the dream should be finished together. Why should she fear?

Behind her there was a silence as of death: not a murmur of all the stirring life of the great house came to her through the thick doors. In the silence and the darkness she sat shivering. An ice-cold hand seemed to be holding her heart, squeezing the blood from it, turning the blood in her veins to ice. Yet why should she fear? No sound from the house: but faint sounds coming to her through the open window—a footstep a long way off in the garden, a footstep on the gravel, and farther away still, faint noises from the stables, a man's voice—one of the grooms calling to another. They were closing the stables for the night: the great Mr. Slade was going his rounds. This was the last time that she would hear such sounds. Soon the silence would be complete. And again the ice-cold hand seized her, tearing at her heart, filling her lungs with ice, stopping her from breathing. Oh why should she fear? What was there in all the pitiless world that should make her cling to life?

Then, very faintly, there came the sound of a dog barking—shrilly and faintly, but persistently. It was her dog. Mr. Slade was giving her dog a last run before he closed the stables, and her dog was barking at the stable cat. In her misery she had forgotten her dog. What would happen to him to-morrow and afterwards? As she thought of him, tears flowed down her cheeks: warm tears, a fountain of yearning tenderness beneath which the icy hand melted. 'You'll not betray me?' 'No my darling,' she sobbed, 'I'll not betray you. I'll keep my promise. For your sake I'll go on with it.'

Thus the poor dog paid a little of his debt of gratitude—by saving her from a suicide's grave.

Sobbing still, and whispering hysterical promises, she put away Lady Augusta's wicked implements; and then flung herself down on her bed to cry herself to sleep.

XXXI

ALL his life he had been given whatever he wanted. With regard to women, as in all other matters, the wish of the young prince had been a command. He had wooed as a prince woos: a few smiles, while he talked of common things—no tedious preparation, laborious contrivance of opportunity, or painful invention of pretty words that should soften and charm,—then the simple declaration of his love. 'The prince has made his choice and the prince has chosen you.'

Many years ago, when he was quite a boy—a schoolboy passing through London in charge of one of the trustees of his vast estate,—a queer old man at the club where they dined had told him that when he loved he would only have to drop his handkerchief, and for him all the rest would follow as a matter of course; and the prophecy had come true always, till now.

With the love that is publicly bought and sold all was very simple for him. There could be no chaffering, since he could pay more than the market price. Thus it had been in briefly episodic unions with the pretty actress of the hour, the much-photographed lady from over the Channel who came from Paris to conquer London and return with her spoils, with the reigning queen of English photograph shops—Mrs. Granby for instance. Such arrangements had been as the purchase of a hunter, a chaser, a charger, or a polo pony. My lord must naturally get the best.

Then there had been society ladies—a refinement in outward phenomena, but an unchanged basis to the traffic: a bill to pay in diamonds instead of banknotes. Then had come Mrs. Arncliffe, the famous society beauty, the brilliant enchantress. She was at the height of her fame, at the height of her wonderful flashing beauty, with one-half of the world at her feet, and the other half busily talking scandal about her. Men were falling in love with her before they had even seen her: she was a name, a type, a symbol; in her attendant train of would-be lovers there were wise men, old men, great men; young and old followed the glowing eyes, the flashing smile, and sighed for those favours which scandal said she lavished on a happy band

of selected adorers. Openly, imperiously, with a complete defiance of opinion, she captured young Lord Helensburgh. He was the richest bachelor in England, a future duke, the greatest prize in the marriage market, whose presence made dowagers turn faint with longing and débutantes go pale then pink, and in a moment Mrs. Arncliffe killed hope by claiming him as her prey. Helensburgh was settled for life, it was said: he would never escape the toils now. It was a flagrant open scandal year after year, an intrigue talked about in the suburbs, plainly hinted at in the public press, known of by people on omnibuses, in third-class carriages, behind shop counters, in public-house bars and music-hall promenades.

The husband was in truth a poor weak creature, who had been married for his money, and who, when buying his pretty wife, should have known himself incapable of guarding her. From the first, he accepted his disgrace with a cynical composure; followed his wife's progress through Fashion's gayest haunts for a season or two; then disappeared. No one had been disturbed by his presence: no one seemed relieved by his absence. He had seen the nods and shrugs of the world and had affected not to see them, had heard ugly things said and politely refrained from betraying that he heard them; and now he showed himself no more. Perhaps he was soon weary of the expensive toy: and, seeking consolations on a lower social plane, was contented in his freedom. Certainly, Mrs. Arncliffe could not complain if he received visits from young ladies who were not admitted at court, and employed a private secretary who had been discovered and engaged in a massage establishment in Jermyn Street. Then, in his quiet, unobtrusive life, had fallen the stroke of doom, and for the first time Mr. Arncliffe was an object properly deserving of pity. Not as a deceived husband, but as an incurable invalid might he say that fate had dealt hardly with him. A creeping paralysis had seized him in the midst of his consolations, and the secretary gave place to a hospital nurse. Henceforth one might pity him —a man, very slowly, imperceptibly, but surely, changing from life to death: nerve by nerve, muscle after muscle, shrinking, drying, hardening, withering, until already he was but as a corpse galvanised into movement when he tottered to and fro in the sunlight leaning on his two sticks.

All the world was of Lady Augusta's opinion as to the nature of the bond between Helensburgh and Mrs. Arncliffe. They were waiting on Death's slow march to legitimise their love. '*You* see,' said Lady Augusta, 'she will be Duchess of Morecambe.' But the world and Lady Augusta were wide of the

mark here. Whatever Mrs. Arncliffe's ambition might be, Helensburgh had never entertained this nuptial project. Very frankly he made her understand. He was careless of all else perhaps, but the honour of his family was dear to him. When he married—and he must marry some day—his wife must be one of whom all the dead men behind him would approve. By inherited instinct, by early training, by precept of granny, he had been confirmed in this, the best tradition of his race. Built up very slowly from the legends of the foundation of their family, this had come to be the creed of the house—a binding law which could be broken only by one who was a traitor to the past and a traitor to the future: the wives of St. Kevernes must be virtuous. Granny in her splendid retreat might rage against the scandal of the long intrigue, but she knew that the young prince would not fail her and the dead men. This loose-lived woman would never reign over the St. Keverne realm as queen-consort.

This then had been the tale of my lord's light loves. From the beginning they had fallen about thus: the fame of the woman, not the woman herself, working the charm. Always there had been glamour—that outer fabric that is spun from other men's desire, wherein the real woman hides herself, from which she does not emerge until she has torn a strip from the dazzling garment to bandage the eyes of her new slave.

Now for the first time the process had been reversed for him. Slowly, before his inattentive, uncaring, then wondering eyes, this girl had spun the veils of glamour, had wrapped herself in her magic robe. Insignificant, unthought of, a vague figure on the moving background of his hurried life, she had slowly come forward into the strong light of desire, bringing the light with her, making the light herself, until with a skirt of the fire-cloak she had touched him and set him on fire. Then this was love, he thought, and he had never been in love before. All else had been a solace: this was a necessity.

Looking back, he could trace now the growth of his thoughts of her. The faint brain-image returning unsummoned, stronger and firmer each time that it returned. An interesting girl, a girl a little different from the common ruck—he was conscious of the interest that she had aroused as he talked of her—to granny, to Mr. Frensham, to Johnny Hartnell, to Mrs. Arncliffe. He had an idle curiosity to learn something about the girl's history—that was all. Johnny Hartnell had praised her. The wisest girl he had ever met—that was all Sir John knew.

But Mrs. Arncliffe knew a lot.

From Mrs. Arncliffe he learned of a recent chapter in the girl's life. She had served in a Sloane Street shop and had often waited upon Mrs. Arncliffe. They were a lively set of young ladies in this blouse-emporium, and Mrs. Arncliffe laughed. 'I didn't know that Lady Colwyn was so liberal-minded,' and she laughed again.

My lord frowned: he never liked the introduction of granny's name in his talks with his lady-love.

Then, at Hawkridge again, granny herself had told him a little more. A girl decently born, but very poor: with a bad father who had now died, leaving her alone in the world. Poor little girl! When granny told him of an anonymous letter containing accusations against the girl's character, he had said that they must be lies, and granny had agreed. Yet he had believed that the accusations were true enough very likely. Why not? He had spoken in kindness and pity—moved by the strong male instinct to shield and protect. The girl's life had been a sad one. That she had told him. It would be cruel not to wish that she might have a long respite from pain—and in his thought he used her own strange phrase. Even while he talked to granny, he had pieced together what seemed the outlines of her story. She had loved not wisely: men or a man had been unkind to her—that was the cause of all the sadness. Poor little defenceless wanderer, she was safe here—young enough to forget the unkindness: and her past was not a matter that any one should trouble granny about.

Then later, as he pondered and the brain-image came and went, he found himself foolishly talking in imagination to the object of his thoughts. 'You poor pale Vivien, it is time that some one was kind to you. Would you like a man to be really kind to you—just for a little while—and drive away all the sadness? I think I know some one who would be kind to you—if, if you tempted him.' Thus foolishly he talked to himself in the train one day ere he dismissed the thought from his mind, and ordered the thought never to present itself again.

He must not make a fool of himself. He was busy mapping out his life, planning and scheming the serious interests of his career. Already he had wasted too much time in boyish pleasures. The hour had come for a man's work to begin. It would be fatally weak to be drawn from the mapped-out path by a foolish self-indulgence. But the banished thought came back with aggressive violence, driving out the good thoughts that he had invited, sending them helter-skelter.

He was compelled to talk of the girl, as he was compelled to think of her. With Mrs. Arncliffe he was always returning to

the hateful subject. To Mrs. Arncliffe the subject was very hateful. This girl was her enemy. Instinctively she felt the danger advancing—had always felt it as it seemed to her now. She had laughed at her cousin when he came to her raving about his wretched shop-girl, but she had hated her even then. It was horrible to her that any one to whom she had been kind should seek the kindness of another—horrible, though it was only Claude Stanford. She had used her tongue as a well-wisher to Mrs. Wardrop—in order to remove the annoyance. It had been a fatal blunder; and when she found the girl established at Hawkridge she had dreaded her as well as hated her. She had used her pen now—as a well-wisher to Lady Colwyn—and had tried to remove the danger.

'Why do you ask me about her?' and her jealousy flamed into open rage. 'What do I know? What do I care? If it amuses you to make love to your grandmother's servants, I suppose you must do it—but you need not tell me about it.'

Then he too was angry: frightening her with anger that she had never seen before. It needed all her syren's art to efface the traces of her words.

'Harry—don't be cruel,' and the syren hung about his neck, with soft words and clinging caresses. 'Why are you angry with me? I didn't mean what I said—don't you want me to love you—and if I love you how can I help wishing to save you from all that is not worthy of you? . . . But what is it you want to know? I'll answer all your questions. Well, this is what I do know. She was living with a man here in London before she went to Lady Colwyn's.'

'How do you know that?' he asked her sternly.

'I do know that—as a fact.'

'*How* can you know it?'

'Never mind how. It's true. So now don't you see why I was angry for a moment. Harry, don't be cruel. Haven't I a right to be angry—when you talk to me about another woman—whoever she is?'

She flattered and cajoled. She had no fear really, she said, that he would ever forget all that was due to himself—to the splendid king among men that she, his poor slave, adored, worshipped, etc. etc. etc.

'Harry, you could not sink to that,' and then, for one not of a literary turn, she made a very creditable flight.

'You'd not forget that the lion hunts and kills his own game. He does not feed—on leavings.'

But in all the weeks when he was away from her, down at Hawkridge, he wrote only once—a scrawl in pencil in reply to

all her letters—saying that his hand was better, that he was in good health, that she need not be anxious. He was slipping from her power—she suffered a long torture of impotent rage as the danger came nearer and nearer. He was breaking his chains. Then one day she heard, quite by chance, that he had come back to London. Some one had seen him. He had been back for days and he had not come to her. He had broken the chains?

For five days he struggled with the thought that now possessed him, fought for freedom from the woven spell. As he wandered aimlessly about the London streets, or sat brooding in his rooms at the big hotel, he was truly as one spellbound.

She was fond of him. He was sure that she loved him—or was ready to love him should he ask for her love. And walking and sitting, riding and lying down, he talked to her in imagination.

'My pretty Vivien—you should not have tempted me with your questioning, haunting eyes, and your flickering love-flag rising and falling whenever I touched your cold hands. Cold hands, Vivien, but a warm heart.' Whispering to her in this foolish manner, perhaps he thought that she heard him across fifty miles of hill and dale, winding valley and bare down. It is the oldest illusion, and the most perilous with lovers—this childish fancy that when words have been thought, the words have been heard. 'Vivien, I am trying to escape—I am fighting for freedom. . . . Vivien, I forgive you all the past. You would not have loved those other men if you had known me. I should have been your first love then.'

Why not? He was very young still. No hurry, really! One year of love—one more year of boyhood—'Second childhood if you like: because you have made me a child again, you childish Vivien—one long year of boy and girl love, Vivien. Then the business of life and you shall stay with me still if you like, helping me still—my secret, jealously guarded philosopher and guide.'

So then he wrote his letter, and came hastening to add the last few words to all his unheard whispering.

His heart's desire had been denied to him. Again in London, on the day after his interview, his mind was as a battlefield in which anger and disappointment and doubt were each in turn victorious, and each in turn swept from the ground. Hour after hour the conflict went on without pause, and each time that doubt won he suffered more and more. In all his life he had

never done a mean or cowardly thing. Had he been guilty now? Suppose that she was really an innocent, friendless girl who had been saved by natural pride from going the way of other girls of her condition? Suppose that she was, in truth, as pure and as proud as many girls he knew—those well-guarded sisters and daughters of whom this at least could be safely said: that they made no trips before marriage? Suppose that, in spite of all probability, she was in feeling and mind as one of this proud band from amongst whom he must some day choose a wife? If he had gone to one of these and bluntly invited her to come and live with him, how would that have been? That would have been a base insult to offer, and all the brothers and cousins would have leapt at his throat to avenge it. But if she had stood alone, forced to face the outrage without aid—defenceless and at his mercy—might she not have spoken as this girl—of his chivalry—and, striking the lips that he had kissed, have asked him to remember?

Then it was the turn of disappointment—this gnawing pain, produced by balked aim and failure in achievement, that he had never felt till now. Of course she is frail. He knows the world and weighs the chances—all against her innocence; and for it, nothing: nothing but this pale phantom of memory, the proud calm outlook, the sweet bell laugh, the frank brave smile.

And anger sweeps all else before it. She has tricked him, fooled him, as he told her—drawn him on with fixed design. He might be fool enough for anything, she has argued, while she acted out her little play of shy reserve—shrinking from his eyes, seeming to avoid his admiration: the virtuous shop-girl who has studied mankind through a London shop-window and learned that mock-modesty with mincing steps that seem to hurry has more street-followers than complaisance looking round and beckoning. If he will pay the fabulous price that fools will sometimes pay, very well, she is his. If not—she has lost nothing. In this manner she has reasoned, weaving her spell about him through all those quiet days—a husband, not a protector, to be caught, if she plays her cards well. Not once has the preposterous thought come to him, but she has been harbouring it all the time—the chance of a lifetime: a splendid marriage if she is clever enough to beguile the fool.

'Oh no my girl—not that. Not that,' and he laughed bitterly.

But hour after hour, walking, riding, dressing and dining, the internal torment continued.

Late in the evening, almost maddened by doubt's victory again, he came bursting into Mrs. Arncliffe's morning room at

Lennox Gardens. My lord was admitted at all hours. It was a long time since my lord had taken advantage of this privilege. The obsequious servants were glad to see him again. A maid came out on the staircase, and whispered and laughed for a few moments with the grinning man who had ushered my lord to the morning room.

'Harry! You have come back to me. Oh how cruel—how very cruel you have been.'

She was a haggard syren to-night, pallid and forlorn, a fevered beauty lolling on a sofa: a miserable enchantress whose charms have played her false. But, as she sprang to her feet, the light and the life returned; the flash and glow of colour was there in a moment; and her eyes glittered in triumph. He had not deserted her.

'What you told me about that girl'—he asked fiercely—'was it the truth, or was it a lie?'

'About the milliner's young lady?—of course it was true.'

'But *how* did you know? Tell me the man's name.

Slowly she went back to the sofa and sat looking at him with glittering eyes.

'Who was it? If you know so much. Tell me that.'

'Very well. It was Claudie Stanford.'

'But *how* do you know?'

'He told me so himself. Only the other day he told me so again—he told me I might tell you. . . . *Now*, are you satisfied?'

'Yes,' and he laughed. 'He told you himself, did he?' and he laughed again and walked to and fro about the pretty room. 'Well,' and he came to the sofa and stood looking down at her. 'Well now I know that what always seemed probable is really true.'

'Yes,' and she touched his hand caressingly, and smiled at him.

'And what was all that you said about the lion? The lion should not take leavings. I think you are right. I'll have no more of your jackal-cousin's leavings.'

'Harry. You needn't be rude to my cousin. But I'm glad that—'

'Glad that you've opened my eyes. But do you understand what I mean? You have proved to me that you are this man's mistress. Men only tell secrets of that sort to women they have a right to despise.'

Thus rudely my lord broke his chains and went raging away, free at last. And all through the long sleepless night he raged at the monstrous injustice of fate. He was a good sort: in the well-worn formula, all men admitted it; he had never done a mean, a cruel, or a cowardly thing; he was an earl and soon he would be a duke; he was the richest bachelor

in the peerage; he had mines and harbours, railways, forests, rivers, lakes, six houses as big as this big hotel, more horses than he could ride, more clothes than he could wear, ridiculously more money than he could possibly spend—and yet from no fault of his own he had been made the most miserable young man on the face of the earth.

There was a white-haired old lord who lived in lodgings in Conduit Street. This Lord Penrith was the last survivor of that junta of wise men who had acted as trustees during the young man's minority. He had been a soldier, and had once commanded Helensburgh's regiment. He had lived in camps and in courts; had been hardened by war service; scarred with battle; then smoothed and polished again by soft palace-duty: Silver Stick in Waiting, and so on. He was tall and thin and white, a well-known figure in the great world for forty years and more, one whose word was law on many matters, from points of honour to waistcoat buttons and tie-pins. To this old mentor Helensburgh came bubbling over with sudden unexpected chatter, feeling that he must talk to some one or go out of his mind.

'Henry, my dear boy, I'll be with you in a moment.'

The old fellow had emerged from his back room, wherein he and his servant were busily engaged testing the effects of a marvellous new cream upon a very old pair of patent-leather shoes. He retired again and left the young man fidgeting and pacing about the front room. There were no knicknacks or pretty decorations to be admired in this plainly furnished sitting-room—letters and cards of invitation stuck in the looking-glass, pipes and a tobacco-jar on the mantelpiece, framed photographs of a bygone day: faded groups of whiskered men in preposterous top-hats and balloon trousers, faded ladies in crinolines, ladies that had won hearts, horses that had won races, dogs that had won prizes, a long, long time ago.

'Henry, my dear boy, how are you?' and the old fellow, having dismissed his servant, emerged again.

Then Helensburgh poured out his wrongs and his troubles. This was the only man in the world to whom he could talk thus freely. He talked as to a comrade of his own age, and so the old man replied. Years could not make a gulf between them: each loved and trusted the other.

'So 'tis over—good-bye my love—with your friend. Well, I'm not so sorry to hear it. I'd not distress myself for *that*.'

No, Helensburgh would not fret because of the rupture with

Mrs. Arncliffe. She had been false to their bargain; she had not been faithful to him; he never wanted to see her again. Then he told the old man all about Mr. Claude Stanford.

'She swore there was nothing in it. He was her useful cousin —tame cat, you know—she and he had been pals all their lives, and so on. Well of course I know what people said—I had a row once with a man who'd been cackling about it. But they were deuced careful never to give me a chance of bowling them out. You'd heard the tale I suppose?'

'Oh yes,' and Lord Penrith nodded.

'Well, I didn't believe it. I thought she was true to our bargain. There was to be no one else—I was to be the only one. That was our compact from the first.'

The old lord nodded again with grave approval. A very proper treaty—but difficult to enforce the conditions.

'Damn the fellow,' cried Helensburgh, 'what the devil does he mean by coming between us?' and he roundly cursed the audacity of Mr. Stanford. 'I've always hated the sight of the fellow. Infernal outsider! You know he was in the Coldstreams and he had to go—I forget which battalion, but they hoofed him out of it.'

Oh yes, Lord Penrith knew of Mr. Stanford's career. It was quite true. The man had to go.

'What was it—the white feather?'

'No. Something about a woman—No he's not a coward. He'd treated some woman shabbily—something of that sort—and it all came out, and they didn't like it.'

'Why didn't they kick him out of his clubs? I saw him the other night at Green's—and he belongs to the Turf.'

'He left the Guards' Club.'

'Well,' said Helensburgh, 'I think I must tell him what I think of him.'

'You'll not do anything foolish—'

'No. I'm not a fool,' said Helensburgh. 'But I'll think out some way of letting him understand that I know all about it, and give him a plain hint to keep out of my way in future.'

The old man shrugged his shoulders. These were degenerate days. When one felt oneself aggrieved in affairs of the heart, really one was forced to ignore the outrage to one's pride. If a lady had the bad taste to take another lover—one must be done with the business, cut it short and laugh—never let the world see that one cared. Unhappily it was no longer possible to punish the male offender.

'My dear boy,' said the wise old mentor, 'I understand all your feelings, and I only wish you could get the fellow out

early in the morning and have a shot at him. But as you can't do that, you'd best just ignore the fellow's existence. 'Tis no good wishing one was just a bus-driver or a city clerk, and could go and punch the fellow's head—because one isn't a bus-driver.'

'No,' and Helensburgh laughed. 'I'm not a fool. I know I can't do that.'

That was the way, said Lord Penrith—laugh and let no one guess you were annoyed. And really, the old man ventured to say, this connection had perhaps lasted sufficiently long. It was a happy release for Helensburgh, no matter how it had been effected.

But then the young man disclosed the true character of the wound from which he was smarting. There was a girl with whom he might have been very happy, and here again this infernal fellow had interfered. He grew hotter and hotter as, pacing the room, he told the old man all about the girl. In this case the summit of audacity had been attained.

'There she was at Hawkridge under my grandmother's roof, and this fellow comes there to see her—she wouldn't see him. But he came. I saw him myself. For all I know he may have been often. What do you say to that?'

The old lord was silent. He could not sympathise in this secondary trouble. He did not relish this story of the pursuit of Lady Colwyn's companion by the man Stanford—or by Lady Colwyn's grandson.

'He boasts about it'—said Helensburgh—'tells people that she was with him in London before she came to Hawkridge. . . . What do you think of that? I wonder if it's all a lie. It's the sort of lie a fellow like that would tell. . . . Anyhow, I mean to let him know what I think of him.'

Again Lord Penrith urged the young man not to do anything foolish, and again Helensburgh said that he was not a fool.

'I'm not a fool. But I'll find out some way of letting him know that he'd better keep wide of my line of country—damn him.'

As he walked down Bond Street, the torment of doubt and jealousy was racking him. Was it, after all, a lie invented by the man and the woman to torment him? Dowagers bowed to him; débutantes thrilled and trembled as he took off his hat. Already the season was beginning: the pavements were thronged; the narrow street was blocked with carriages; all the pretty summer frocks had come out, and all the pretty girls were

looking bright and fresh and spring-like after the long restful winter.

'Mummy! Look! Lord Helensburgh!'

No, it was not a lie—it was the truth. That day when the man came and she would not see him, she had suddenly flushed and hurried away when questioned as to her knowledge of him. She had not met him at the ball for the first time: she confessed that she had known him before. Then the colour springing to her pale face had betrayed her confusion. It was the truth: not a lie.

'Ethel, quick, on your right, Lord Helensburgh!'

As he took off his hat and smiled and passed by, no débutante or dowager could have guessed the torment of thought that was racking him. She had repulsed him, but she had been gentle and yielding to the other. And as he thought of her in the other man's arms, almost intolerable pain possessed him, body and brain. He could see her, while the new torture endured, submissive to the other man's hands, could see him holding her neck, drawing the docile lips down to his own—and all hell seemed to break loose in his brain and he looked at the crowded street and the gay company through a red mist.

'Aunt Kate, do you see? Lord Helensburgh!'

Hot rage seized him. No aunt or niece could guess, as he smiled and passed on, that he was in truth like some wild wounded animal—bleeding, half blind with wrath: a splendid strong beast with his life ebbing out through the tiny hole which the pigmies with their fire-dart have made in wanton sport.

Suddenly the members in that pleasant front room of the old club in St. James's Street looked up in surprise. The sound of the raised voices suddenly breaking the drowsy peace of the quiet room startled everybody.

'Can't you keep that snarling mouth shut—you dog? You have been telling lies about a girl I know—and by God I'll teach you—'

Then, before one could put down one's paper, shake the ash off one's cigar, they were at it—as the members said—hammer and tongs. Never before had such a thing been seen in the light of those old bow windows All leaped to intervene: one old gentleman turned over his table and his tea; a gigantic young subaltern of a Highland regiment upset three chairs in his intervening rush; every one said something ere he could reach the fray; in a moment the open door was filled with hurrying club waiters.

'Helensburgh, are you mad? Stanford! Helensburgh! This is too disgraceful upon my word! This is *too* disgraceful.'

But for the big settee, Mr. Stanford would have gone down. The leather-covered settee saved him from the floor—and then, thanks chiefly to the gigantic young man, they were separated. The disgraceful episode was over.

Not much harm had been done. Helensburgh's forehead had been cut by Mr. Stanford's ring. Mr. Stanford's upper lip had been split and his teeth showed red: a slight abrasion on his nose might mean by to-morrow two well-blacked eyes or nothing at all—according to luck. But they had not really hurt each other—separated too soon, not settled down to their work, too blind with fury for science.

'Let him keep out of my way,' said Helensburgh, 'unless he hasn't had enough—'

'Damn you,' said Stanford, 'if you think—'

And but for the big young man, they would have been at it again.

'Too disgraceful, upon my word,' said the old man who had upset his tea. 'Too disgraceful.' He was a member of the committee.

Helensburgh's face was flushed; his nostrils were dilated; and he was breathing through his nose as he glared at his enemy. Stanford's dark face was duskily pale; his mouth was open; and his breath came fast. If the other gentlemen could have seen their way to allow the two to finish it, the club waiters in the door would have put all their money on his lordship.

XXXII

VIVIEN was walking in the sheltered garden before the old house. With slow footsteps she paced to and fro, taking the gentle exercise that Dr. James had prescribed. She had been ill—off duty for nearly a week, but this morning she had returned to her light tasks. Her dreams were over; life-work stretched before her: she must brace herself for the dull, colourless future, think out plans, prepare herself for all that might be coming. She could not remain here: he had robbed her of the shelter of the strong walls. She could not stay to meet him again.

She thought of it all with an extraordinary listlessness and apathy. She must tell Lady Colwyn that the time had come to choose from the thousand girls another lady-in-waiting: she could stay perhaps for a little while until she became really strong again. As soon as Lady Colwyn had made her selection and was provided with a new companion, she would go back to the labyrinth and hide herself and forget that she had ever been a dreamer.

Then, as she turned, she saw him coming towards her.

'Vivien—I must speak to you.'

'I have nothing to say to you. Please let me go.'

He was very pale; there were dark circles round his eyes, he had changed into the haggard ghost of the smiling young prince whose picture hung in the quiet library: the hand that held her arm was trembling.

'Vivien, I know everything now—do you understand? I know all about you and—and Stanford.'

'What do you know?'

'That you—that you loved him, I suppose. But that's all over—you don't care for him now—you hate him now. Vivien, say you hate him.'

She looked at him steadily, unflinchingly, listening to all that he said, in silence. Once, the ice-cold hand of death had squeezed her heart: this man could not hurt her now.

'Vivien, listen. I'll never speak of it again—but I *know*. Do you understand? What does it matter? All that was

before you knew me. I can forget it if you have forgotten it—and you have forgotten it?'

Then he told her—not in plain words but so that she could not mistake his meaning—that, as she had given herself so lightly to the other man, she must not refuse to give herself to him. He would never remind her of the past, but the future must be his. She must come to him now: he had returned to carry her away boldly, openly, with all the world knowing and watching, for all he cared. They would go to-night to Paris—then on, far away from the prying eyes and the chattering tongues. He knew now that what he had said was true. He could not live without her; he was dying for love of her; unless she came to him now, at once, without an hour's delay, he would go raving mad.

'I think you must be mad already. I gave you my answer.'

Her lips with the red wound on them quivered, her eyes shone for a moment with the reproach that she would not utter. This man had power still to hurt her. The pride that had seemed numb and dead smarted again as he charged her with past shame.

'Vivien! Can you deny it? Can you tell me that it is not true?'

As he looked at the wounded lips, doubt shook him once more. Was it a lie after all—a lie invented to drive him mad? And he thought of those other lips on which he had set his red mark.

'Tell me,' he said again. 'Answer me and I'll believe you—I'll try to believe you. Tell me. Is it the truth or is it a lie?'

Why should she answer? Why should she justify herself? What did it matter how basely he thought of her? He was nothing to her. She would not speak. But then, beneath his haggard gaze, some inner force that she could not control made her answer him.

'No,' she said very slowly. 'It is not true'—and she smiled sadly. 'You see, you do not believe me.'

'I—I am trying to believe you, Vivien! Now say that you will come to me.'

She turned from him, and with heavy footsteps moved towards the house. He still had power to make her suffer.

She must come to him. This was his unceasing cry. Nothing mattered if only she would grant his prayer. In the doorway beneath the library he held her. He would not let her go, he said, until she had given him some promise of hope.

Then at last she pleaded with him for mercy.

'I have been ill—I am weak still—please let me go now—and go away yourself. Leave me in peace—for a few days at least.'

'If I do, will you promise? I—I'll wait—for a day or two. Oh my darling, write to me then and say that you are coming to me.'

Unless she promised to write he could not go away.

'I will write to you.'

'And I may hope—Vivien, I may hope.'

'I will write to you.'

Then, without seeing his granny, without entering the house, he went back to London to wait and to hope.

In this hour of my lord's coming and going, all the servants of the great house—including the watchful Mapleton—were at their dinner. He had driven in a fly from the station and left it waiting at the park gates. Gardeners had seen my lord, and one or two grooms near the stable quadrangle; but within doors none knew that my lord had come to Hawkridge.

Had Mapleton been able to bring to her mistress the strange news that his lordship had been here and had spoken to no one but Miss Shelton, it would have made her very angry, but it would have surprised her less than might have been anticipated.

Two days ago Lady Colwyn had received another letter from her anonymous well-wisher.

'Lord Helensburgh and Mr. Stanford have been fighting about a woman. *Cherchez la femme*, when men forget their manners and brawl in public places. Lady Colwyn will not have far to seek. The bone of contention is in her own house. When Lady C. introduced a scheming adventuress into her family circle she did not do a very wise thing in the opinion of a sincere well-wisher.'

What did the woman mean? Lady Colwyn had very little doubt who Well-wisher was. She was the flaunting wretch who had dared to enslave her grandson, who had dared to hope to bring dishonour later to their house and name, who had set the world talking, whom, with others of her class, Lady Colwyn would willingly have seen flogged at the stone posts in Tellhurst market-place.

Lady Colwyn had written to Lord Penrith, asking him in the name of their old friendship to enlighten her. She did not ask for advice: the old lord was to find out exactly what had happened, and send her a statement of the facts. This

he must do without delay, for her sake and for the sake of his sometime ward. Now she was waiting for the old lord's answer.

It came to-night by the evening post, and Lady Colwyn considered it carefully ere she went to her solitary meal.

It was unhappily true, said Lord Penrith, that there had been a most regrettable fracas between H. and Mr. S. The simple fact was that H. had worked himself into a highly excitable state of mind, and had for the moment lost that solid force of judgment, discrimination, and personal dignity with which he was by nature so richly endowed. This 'occurrence' had immediately resulted from the momentary loss of equilibrium. But Lord Penrith had seen H. both before and after 'the occurrence,' and he was happy to say that equilibrium was almost completely restored. H. was rapidly calming down, recovering self-composure, readily listening to all that one had ventured to urge—in a word, becoming *himself* again.

Then came the unsolicited but excellent advice that the white-haired counsellor could not refrain from offering.

'There is nothing in this that need cause you uneasiness. Very wisely and properly, the club-committee have determined to hush up what was from their point of view most irregular and deplorable. It has been the wish of everybody to avoid discussion and publicity, and I think I may say that there has been practically no talk about it. You need not therefore give the matter another thought. It is, indeed, one of those things that you should altogether ignore.'

Lady Colwyn frowned as she put away Lord Penrith's letter. His lordship had omitted to say a word about 'the bone of contention!' She understood that he could, but would not, tell her what she desired to know.

'Mapleton.'

'Yes my lady.'

'Tell Miss Shelton not to come to me after dinner—but say that I may require her before the evening is over.'

Then, for a long time, Lady Colwyn sat frowning and thinking.

With alacrity Mrs. Mapleton bustled along the corridors to deliver the message. Disaster was in the air to-night. She had waited a long time, but her instinct told her that the hour of crisis had come. Never before had she encountered such obdurate materials in her patient mining operations: it had seemed impossible to lay the mine, but surely now *something* was going to happen. Moving silently about my lady's room, pretending to be occupied, she was devoured by anxiety, burning

with excitement, longing for some sign, however slight, to tell her that the great moment had arrived.

'My lady.'

She must speak. It might be wiser to wait and watch, but the desire to speak was uncontrollable.

'My lady. You stopped me when I wanted to tell you—to tell you all about it. You *ought* to know, my lady—it 's wicked that it should be kep' from you. It must come out—'

'What are you talking about?'

'About Miss Shelton—and his lordship. . . . Oh my lady,' cried the faithful Mapleton, 'don't be angry with me. I hope I know my place, but I can't a-bear that you should be kep' in the dark—'

'Stop. Wait.'

Lady Colwyn remained silent for a little time while Mapleton watched the frowning brows and tried to read the thoughtful face.

'Yes. Tell me now all you wanted to say.'

'Yes, my lady,' and Mapleton gave a gasp of satisfaction. 'Oh my lady—first and foremost it 's been going on a long time. I 'ad my suspicions of what was coming nigh upon a year ago, long before the talk begun—for the talk my lady 'as been something frightful to listen to—not one living soul within these last months but 'as—'

'Stop. Not so fast please. Tell me what you say I ought to know and tell me nothing else.'

'No, my lady,' and Mapleton gulped. She was in terror lest she should be checked before her task was completed. 'His lordship sends her jewellery. You ought to know that, my lady.'

'How do *you* know it?'

'In her waste-paper basket my lady I found the paper what the jewellery case had come in—a big case my lady like what would 'old a diamond necklace—registered Carbutt and Banks, 104 Old Bond Street. I 'ave all the papers safe and can show you my lady. Who else but his lordship would send *her* jewellery? She was on'y in a shop before she come here. And what the most of the girls in those London shops are my lady if you knew as well as I do—'

'I will not listen to you. Be silent. You have nothing to tell me.'

'Oh my lady—I 'ave indeed,' and Mapleton rattled on faster and faster. 'When my lord come and 'urt 'is 'and all the whole house saw what was up. 'Is 'and was well but still he stayed —because of 'er. In the garden he was with her at all hours—

as all could see. In the library at all hours my lady—and Mr. Frensham helping of her all through—as go-between for know he must. . . .

'Oh my lady don't stop me now. . . . I'll on'y speak the simple truth as short as short. All the house and all the village is talking of it. . . . Search her drawers and the jewellery you 'll find. Unless when she made excuse to go to London, she sold it—which is possible . . . when at night you go to bed *she* slips down to the library and is alone with his lordship—as I proved myself one night by going to her room. She was not there but in the library with his lordship and coming out I spoke to her. She cannot deny it. . . .

'But oh my lady it was not on'y in the library they was together at night, as I can prove. . . .'

And then she made her abominable accusation:—

My lord's door open in the middle of the night; my lord not in his room—but somewhere else—where else, all the tattling world of the great house might guess.

'I do not believe one word of it.'

'Oh my lady how can you help believing it? It's what she plotted for from the first—come here a purpose very probable, and she's got her reward. Don't go by what I'm telling you. Put the question to others. Whenever did his lordship stay here like he's done, till *she* come? She's been sly enough my lady up till the last months, but now she's got her reward, and don't take no trouble for to hide it, and a disgrace it is my lady carrying it on under your very eyes. Suppose she was one of the ordinary servants—'

'Stop. I'll hear no more. You may go now.'

'Very good, my lady,' and Mapleton withdrew. Her face was flushed and her eyes glowed: she was well content.

'There,' she said to herself in the corridor. 'Rub that off the slate, miss, if you can.'

Lady Colwyn sat thinking very deeply.

This girl had become troublesome—a source of annoyance instead of a source of comfort. Then the girl must go.

It was quite in accordance with the grand old traditions that the young prince should condescend to look with favour upon a maid of honour, and in the good old days such condescension and its result could, as the old lord said, be safely ignored. But nowadays, castle walls were no protection against criticism. Hawkridge must be above reproach; no irregularities could be countenanced; much as she loved him, she could not permit even him to convert her house into a second Hacketts.

How much was true or how little? Really it did not matter.

Enough had happened to break the splendid peace of her little realm, to threaten her with public comment—and to her mind public comment, if only the gossip of her village, was something sternly to be repressed. Dispassionately and methodically she thought out her course of action, and traced, in the past, all the clues that should aid her judgment.

This man Stanford was the objectionable person of whom she had often heard. If he and her boy fought, surely they would fight about the wicked beauty, and not about this girl? But the man Stanford knew the girl—he had come here one day to see her. He had known her in London perhaps. Slowly those warning letters had done their work. This was the man spoken of as having been the lover of the girl in London. Was it true or false? Really it mattered very little: but the introduction of this name confirmed her in the assumption that the letters had come from Mrs. Arncliffe. She had guessed the identity of Well-wisher from circumstantial evidence. And now it all seemed clear enough. This jealous woman would be the first to know of the new turn of my lord's fancy: she of all people would be the quickest to attack her rival. If the fight had been because of Mrs. Arncliffe, Well-wisher would have been silent. Then this much indeed was true: the girl had indeed been the cause of the quarrel.

As for the rest—it was not worth thinking about. The girl must be removed; Hawkridge was no place for her. She thought of her lady-in-waiting without bitterness or anger. Once or twice she had wondered if there was a chance of something like this occurring, and then had decided that no such chance was worth consideration. Once it had seemed that the young man was unduly interested in the girl's history, and for a little time she had observed them closely, waiting and wondering. But he had asked no more questions, had seemed to have forgotten the subject of his inquiries, and she had then been sure that his transitory interest had sprung from the careless kindness which he showed to all. Observing the girl, there had been nothing—absolutely nothing—to arouse suspicion. She could not now think of her as one secretly plotting to gain the young man's love; but, on the other hand, it was impossible to think of her as resisting the love when it came. Who could resist him? Was he not as sunshine in the dull old house?

There was no bitterness in her thought of the girl, but bitter thoughts came to her as she sat brooding. Pain lay in all her thoughts of her grandson himself. It mattered nothing what happened to this girl, or to a thousand such girls. She, and the Mapletons, servants, tenants, all who dwelt on her domain,

became to her as shadows when she thought of her boy. He was all that remained to her of love and of life.

When had he ever stayed so long, gladdening her eyes, filling her heart with happiness, bringing the sunshine into her gloomy rooms—until the girl came? Not for her, but for this young companion, had he consented to linger. And she had been foolish enough to believe that he had liked to be with her—a grim and dull old woman to whom he could only be kind from a sense of duty. In this thought lay the pain and the bitterness. Henceforth she would be alone: she would not draw him to her with a pretty bait. She would not take even the sunshine of her life on the Hacketts terms.

Then she rang her bell and summoned her lady-in-waiting.

'Miss Shelton, I have come to the conclusion that you have been here long enough. You had better arrange to go at once—to-morrow.'

'Yes. But Lady Colwyn, will you tell me why you are sending me away?'

'I think you know very well. But we will not say anything about that, if you please,' and her ladyship briefly stated that Miss Shelton would in the morning receive her salary, together with an additional payment which must be accepted in lieu of a longer notice that her engagement was coming to an end.

'Lady Colwyn. I was intending to ask you to let me go as soon as you could find some one to take my place. I want to go—but I can't let you dismiss me like this—as though I was some housemaid in disgrace—without giving me an explanation.'

Lady Colwyn looked at the pale face and waved her hand with an almost contemptuous gesture.

'You are not a fool,' she said sternly, 'and of course you know why I dismiss you. But you may say this, if you are asked why you left me—that I am making changes in my household and that I no longer need your services. If I am asked, that is what I shall say. There. That is sufficient. Good-bye.'

'I think you are wicked and cruel—I have done nothing wrong—nothing that I am afraid any one should know of—nothing to justify you in treating me like this.'

'Listen. You are a very foolish girl. If I give you my reasons, I must give them to other people if inquiries are made.'

'I am not afraid of your telling people the truth.'

'Very well. You are dismissed because you have not conducted yourself properly with my grandson, Lord Helensburgh.'

'That is not true. If you tell people that, you will tell them what is not true.'

'Be good enough to leave the room.'

'Oh Lady Colwyn, how cruel—how cruel you are. What have I ever done that you should believe . . .'

'Stop. I have not asked you to defend yourself—but if you will make all this fuss—I will listen to what you have to say for yourself.'

What could she say? She could not lay bare her wounded pride and aching heart; she could not throw herself at the feet of this stern judge, and tell her the truth, all that there was to tell, of a foolish dream and a rude awakening.

'Well?' said Lady Colwyn, but still Vivien remained silent.

Lady Colwyn shrugged her shoulders.

'Here is a simple question. Is it true that late at night, after I had gone to bed, you went down to the library and were alone with Lord Helensburgh?'

'Yes, I did once.'

'Was that a becoming thing to do? Why did you do it?'

'He asked me to go and write letters for him.'

'At that time of night? How many letters did you write?'

'I won't answer you. It is wicked of you not to believe in me—hateful and cruel of you. Whatever I said, you wouldn't believe me. It is an insult to ask me such questions. I won't answer them.'

'I think you are wise.'

She had made up her mind that she could not remain here: he had robbed her of the shelter of the strong walls. She had quite determined to go. Then what did it matter how she went: whether dismissed with kind words and smiles, or with frowns and contempt?

'Good-bye, Lady Colwyn. When you pay me, please let me have my salary and nothing more. I can't accept the other money you spoke of. I think you have treated me very cruelly.'

'Oh nonsense. You must take what Richards will send you in the morning. Good-bye.'

Perhaps to Lady Colwyn the girl was really no more than the girl's dog. They had become troublesome and must be removed without delay. Or she may not have been as cruel as she seemed. If Helensburgh cared for the girl, he would look after her. Certainly, as my lord had smiled upon her, she would not now be in danger of want.

Next day the great house vibrated with the wonderful news. Miss Shelton's box had for the second time been brought out into the searching daylight; Miss Shelton was packing. One or two people heard the news with regret as well as wonder: Ellen,

the little housemaid, was crying over the loss of a kind friend; Mr. Frensham was greatly perturbed and quite incoherent in his expressions of concern; Mr. Slade himself drove Miss Shelton and her dog to the station.

'And there,' said Mrs. Mapleton, coming to the head of the big staircase and pointing with outstretched arm as the carriage rolled away—'there. That's what happens to them as cross my path.'

And as the dreadful words flashed far and wide, all the hidden menial world of the great house trembled.

To Lord Helensburgh waiting in London there came, in due course, two letters.

'I am going away,' said Vivien, in the letter that with feverish haste he opened first. 'I only write to you because you made me promise. I hope I shall never see you again. You have made me very unhappy and I want to forget that I have ever known you.'

The other letter was from Mr. Frensham.

'Miss Shelton has left Hawkridge this morning for good. From what has reached me I understand that some unpleasantness has occurred, and that Lady Colwyn being displeased has caused this very sudden arrangement. I am very sorry. In the few words I had with Miss Shelton she bade me good-bye with astonishing kindness, but did not make any confidence. I am sorry to send you this news, but in obedience with your request I can only send it to reach you as soon as possible. You will not blame me for this happening because it was quite beyond my power to prevent it. Yours obediently, HENRY F.'

By the next train my lord was hastening to Hawkridge, and by mid-day he stood before his granny.

'Is this true—what they tell me—that you have sent her away?'

'Yes—it is quite true.'

'I can never forgive you for doing this.'

'What else could I do?'

He is respectful, but terrible. It is the reigning prince talking to the dowager-princess: it is the head of the house, the ruler, who speaks; and granny listens with strange deference shows him by voice and manner that she does not question his right to call her to account, that she knows it is her duty to listen and to obey until obedience becomes impossible. But here, the limit of obedience has been passed.

'You should have consulted me. It was a cruel thing to do. You know that the girl is friendless—alone in the world.'

'Not quite alone—I understand. You, yourself, have relieved me of all obligations.'

Then the old woman makes her defence. It is her boy's fault, not hers. It is he who really sent the girl away.

'Because I loved her! But is that how you deal with a girl I love—drive her from you without one word to me—drive her out to starve for all you know? Where has she gone? Do you know?'

'No, I do not know.'

'She left some address I suppose?'

'I have not inquired.'

'What money had she? Hardly any?'

'I offered her money—a sufficient present. But she would not take it. The cheque is over there—in that envelope. You can see for yourself.'

'And yet you let her go. Granny, I must go and find her. You must take her back again. I must bring her back, and you must reinstate her here—for a little while at least, she must come back.'

'Harry, I cannot take her back.'

Then, pacing about the room, frowning, clenching his fists and waving his arms, he upbraids the dowager-princess, speaks of his love openly and plainly as only princes speak, and demands the return of the disgraced maid-of-honour as an act of common justice.

'Do you understand? She would have nothing to do with me—I told her that I couldn't live without her—I asked her to come away with me—and she told me I had insulted a defenceless girl—she refused to listen to me. Do you understand? She refused my love.'

'I did not know this,' says Lady Colwyn gravely, 'but it makes no difference. I cannot have her here.' Then suddenly pride and anger moved her. 'Helensburgh, are you mad? I think you are forgetting yourself strangely. In this house I'll have no woman that you love—as you call it—except the woman that you mean to make your wife. You should not speak to me of any other love but that.'

'I had to tell you to make you understand.'

'I understand very well. It is convenient to you that she should be here within reach—when you honour me with your visits. For a little time, you say—until you have made your terms, and you are ready to provide her with a house of her own. But I'll not have it. No. You must find some other hostess to help you. Ask your friends at Hacketts to help you, but don't ask me.'

Then, very soon, in anger he left her. He had demanded all the information that she could give—the address and names of that firm of solicitors of which she had once spoken. Coldly and sternly she answered his questions.

'I shall not rest until I have found her. Have you told me all that you can?'

'Yes . . . Harry!' and she stretched out her hand and her voice for a moment became gentle and supplicating.

'It was a cruel thing to do without letting me know. If harm comes to her I can never forgive you.'

If harm should come to her. All that she had asked was a respite from pain, and this is how he had answered her prayer. Because of him, she had been driven out into darkness and danger.

Messrs. Clifford, Atkinson and George, as represented by the senior partner, were at once sympathetic, puzzled and slightly suspicious, maintaining a dignified reserve towards the eager inquiries of their noble visitor. They had not long since been in correspondence with Lady Colwyn, and if Lord Helensburgh asked them, they would communicate with her ladyship again. They would also be glad to receive any letter from Lady Colwyn addressed to Miss Shelton, and duly transmit it when an opportunity offered itself. But my lord, walking about the room, brandishing his arms, broke down the reticence of the eminently respectable firm by the violence of his appeals. This young lady had left his grandmother's house because of a most unfortunate misunderstanding; she was not provided with adequate funds; she was alone in the world—she must be found at once, without an hour's delay. It was a matter of life and death, not of writing letters and copying them in a book and pigeon-holing the answers. They must tell him all they knew about her, give him every aid they could, and he must get detectives and advertise for her—put advertisements in every paper in London.

Yes, the senior partner said, she was quite alone—so far as relations were concerned; but she might have many friends. To advertise her name in the newspapers would be a very improper course to pursue, and one against which they must strongly protest. Any advertisement—if, later, it should seem proper to advertise—should be issued by them, and should be very carefully drafted, and initials should be used: certainly the name should not appear. They must consider Miss Shelton in this matter. Lady Colwyn's name might possibly be introduced, but no other name. The eminently respectable firm, in the

person of the senior partner, nearly drove him mad, but finally they told him all they could.

There was a friend of Miss Shelton's—a doctor, whose address they gave, who might be approached. And there was a shop in Sloane Street and a house in Marefield Street. These two addresses were old—a couple of years old; but he might take them away with him. Yes, they would go so far as to promise that if Miss Shelton communicated with them, they would immediately send him a line for the purpose of relieving his anxiety. They might add—with a final breakdown of reserve—that a line from him, in the event of his finding Miss Shelton, would be very welcome in order to relieve *their* anxiety.

But no lines were exchanged. Miss Shelton had disappeared; the vast labyrinth had swallowed her and her dog; and the art of man could not trace her. It was, said the detectives, enormously in their favour that money was no object: these investigations, when speed was urgently demanded, were in their essence costly. Another element of hope was the dog. A solitary girl coming into London at one end might traverse all its length and go out at the other end without any one observing her. Or indeed, she might remain in London for a considerable time without permitting one to be really sure of putting one's hand on her. But a girl with a dog was something totally different. It should not, my lord, be difficult to do what you desire, with a dog and a blank cheque to help us.

Days passed, weeks passed, a month was gone, but the mazes of the labyrinth held their secret. Walking, riding, lying down, he thought of it. What was happening to her now? Into what dark recesses of peril and famine and fear had he driven her? If harm should come to her, if shame should come to her, if death should come to her! Sleepless, baffled, hopeless, he cursed his detectives, he cursed his money, he cursed himself. Money will not buy everything, my lord; it is a most useful adjunct in this delicate investigation; but do not be impatient: we are doing all we can for you to find your lost self-composure, your vanished appetite, and your mislaid pleasant dreams.

This Dr. Quinlan, the hunters reported, had recently married, had obtained a Government appointment in the West Indies, and had gone there many weeks ago. This Sloane Street shop was under a new management; the old proprietor (name Wardrop) had sunk in the world and disappeared; there was not a living soul in the shop who had been there two years ago. Some one answering the description, the clever hunters believed, had visited the shop making inquiries if another hand was wanted, but, it appeared, so many girls visited the shop in search of

employment that one must not be too positive about this. The house in Marefield Street had changed hands; the landlady (name Kearsley) had been taken away to a hospital after a sale under distraint for rent; and the neighbours believed that she was dead. Some one exactly answering the description had been to the house and asked the servant questions.

As to the rooms in St. James's Street: no one answering the description, with or without a dog, had been there. The tenant (name Stanford) had been very closely watched; every hour of his day had been accounted for; every house he visited, such as the one in Lennox Gardens (name Arncliffe), had been shadowed, but nothing had come of it. This party had gone to Brighton, accompanied by well-paid assistant hunters, but they had not got upon the scent of anything. Be patient, my lord. We are slow but sure. If the person described were dead, we could not of course find her for you alive, but the dog would still be useful if, as sometimes happens, the faithful creature were guarding her grave. Meantime, do be philosophical, my lord. In the end, you may run up against her in the open street and have the laugh of us all by finding her yourself.

Could he have found her thus, face to face in a moment by some kind turn of fate, he would, he thought now, have implored her forgiveness, would have promised never again to molest her, would have only sought to place her in security, to free himself from this torment of regret that by his action he had thrown a helpless girl upon the mercy of a mercilessly hard world.

No one could help him. Old Lord Penrith attempted to pooh-pooh his trouble, hinting that things had worked out all for the best, that what now seemed annoying was perhaps a blessing in disguise; and, in spite of his years and his white hairs, was stormed at as a false comrade, without heart or sense. 'I do beg of you,' wrote the old lord after this interview, when affection had banished resentment, 'that you will look in on my old friend Sir Thomas Granger at 203 Grosvenor Street and take his advice. I think the want of your sleep is telling on you, and may set you in a bad way if you neglect yourself.' But Sir Thomas was a mental specialist and not a private inquiry agent, and he was not therefore visited.

Lady Augusta Hartnell could not help him. She and her husband had just returned from Egypt, Monte Carlo, and the Italian lakes, and she had received no tidings from Miss Shelton. Lady Augusta shed tears when she was informed that her friend had vanished and might at this moment be dying for want of bread. She sent him tearing off to Mrs. Gardiner on the chance that this kind lady might prove of use.

Mrs. Gardiner could not help him. She did not shed tears, and my lord's vague story made her angry. Why had the girl gone, why had Lady Colwyn allowed her to go? When people had young people in their charge, they were answerable for what happened to them—if not answerable to Mrs. Gardiner and those who were working with her, answerable to other and higher authorities to whom all of us would have to render account of our management of such trusts, etc.

'It is all an unfortunate mistake,' said my lord. 'Very unfortunate,' said Mrs. Gardiner, drumming with her fingers on the arm of her chair, and looking over my lord's head at the door. 'A mistake for which some one is surely answerable.' 'I am answerable,' said my lord, 'but for God's sake help me if you can to find her.' 'I will help *her*,' said Mrs. Gardiner, 'if the chance ever comes, but perhaps the best help I may be able to give will be to prevent you ever finding her again.'

No one could help him. Detectives, friends, money—nothing availed him. He was the richest bachelor in the peerage, he had more horses than he could ride, more clothes than he could wear, more houses than he could live in; but his soft bed had become harder than a prison plank, his delicate food had turned into dust and ashes, and with haggard eyes and feverish pulse he walked through the labyrinthine town whispering to himself hour after hour like a man distraught.

'Vivien, forgive me. Vivien, listen to me. Vivien, have pity on me. Now, out of the darkness I call you: Vivien, come to me—now—now—now.'

XXXIII

IN town and in country this summer of ninety-nine was hot and dry and airless. Week after week all the land lay gasping, supine, exhausted, as though waiting for the storm-wind to arise to fan it into life and action. Nothing seemed to matter in these long burning days to the men who ruled the land, to the men who had appointed the rulers, to the men who scarcely knew the names of those who ruled them. The national trade was good; the national credit was good; we were at peace with all the world:—never a cloud in the sunless sky. Thus England, gorged with prosperity, plethoric from success, like a proud full-blooded patient dozing in an easy chair, was waiting for Destiny, that most old-fashioned of physicians, to open a vein and let the red blood flow.

Of a breathless evening towards the end of June, Vivien was effecting a change in the lodgings of her dog. It was in a crowded, suffocating neighbourhood; and Imp the dog had been residing at a house which she herself had only recently left. Now she was moving him to more suitable quarters near her new home. The little yard behind the house contained broken boxes, scaffold poles, baulks of timber, and builders' rubbish which the tenant, a bricklayer, had stored and cherished, as well as rabbit-hutches and a diminutive poultry-run against the fence on its least encumbered side. There was really no room for a dog, and Vivien was very glad to get her charge away from such surroundings.

The son of the house, a boy of thirteen or fourteen who 'understood dogs,' had been instrumental in finding the fresh accommodation in a mews, of which he spoke highly. But now, as she led the dog on a string, he warned her to be wary in treating with the man at the mews.

'Y' understan' me? Mike yer bargain. Don't py what 'e arsts yer.'

Then the boy whistled; then pranced as he walked by her side; and, then, with open arms, made an extraordinary dive at the dog, which caused the dog to spring back almost under her feet.

'Don't, please.'

'Aw right. Ony ply.'

And on they went for a little way, and then the boy dived again.

'Don't.'

'Aw right.'

But, as soon as the pavement became free from the sauntering crowd, the boy made another dive.

'I tell you, you are not to do that.'

'I understan' dogs,' said the boy, aggrieved. 'Ony ply. 'E understan's and loikes it'; and he whistled. 'I done what I could for yer.'

He was aggrieved and he dived no more.

There were two hansom cabs being washed in the dark and narrow mews. The stable to which she was introduced was dark and low, but it seemed fairly clean and was not malodorous.

The man was big and pallid and unprepossessing, but he struck one as being a decent, respectable fellow. In this two-stall stable cab-horses lived; and all day long, as the horses did their work in turn, one stall was empty; and the dog would have the use of the empty stall. He would sleep in a little harness-room, and he might consider this room his own at all hours. He would be well fed and well done in all respects. He would come to no harm: the man was quite sure of that. 't'Osses kick 'im? Lor' no, miss, they're so tired mostly they haven't a kick in them. Besides, I understand dogs. That boy knows that.'

'Yes,' said the boy, ''e understan's dogs.'

At last she was satisfied, and there only remained the question of terms.

'Well miss. Ten shillings a week?'

Furtively, the boy jogged her arm.

'D'you think that too much?' said the man; and again the boy jogged. 'Well, look 'ere miss, I'll say seven and six. Come, that ain't too much?'

'I don't know (jog) whether it is too much,' said Vivien, 'but it is more than I can pay. I think—'

'What yer doing,' the man roared, 'yer young devil?'

Freely jogging, the boy had been detected.

Then she offered five shillings a week.

'Done,' said the man. Then turning to the boy, who had retired through the door: 'Get out of this.' He was white with fury. 'Get out I say. Blarsted boy to come between you and me,' and terrible threats of vengeance followed the small retreating figure.

It was the old story—no interference. Let every one keep his place: rather death than interference.

'Well,' said the man. 'Five shillings. Is that done?'

No, not done yet. She could not leave her dog with such a fury.

'What more d'ye want?'

'You must be kind to him. That must be in the bargain. You must promise that you'll be really kind to him.'

'All right. Don't you worry about that. I ain't an unkind man as I knows of, but that blarsted boy has upset me. He's put me all of a tremble,' and he called up a narrow flight of stairs to his wife. 'Mother! Young lady come about her dog, thinks I ain't kind to dogs—'

The wife, with a child clinging to her skirt at the top of the stairs, reassured Vivien. The dog would not be ill-treated: certainly not. Her man down there understood dogs. If the dog was nice with children, he would be permitted to come upstairs now and then, and would probably be made a pet of by all the family. So then, five shillings for the first week's board and lodging was paid, and Imp was left with his new guardians.

Outside the mews the boy was waiting for her. She thanked him gratefully; shook hands with him; and pressed into his dirty palm a couple of shillings.

'Oi sy. Miss—can yer spare it? Two whites is a lot o' money for what I done for yer,' and he looked at her keenly. 'Sure yer can spare it?' and he made a curious pantomimic gesture. 'See this wet. See this dry. I don't want it if yer can't spare it.'

Vivien was quite sure she could spare it, and the boy shook hands again very cordially ere he departed whistling. So young: only fourteen, but a man already in heart and thought and deeds.

It was late now, past ten o'clock—too late to go to the free library in the Margrave Road: so, after a glance at the big clock outside the North London Railway Station, she strolled slowly homeward. In the humbler streets the shops were still open and doing a thriving trade. One narrow street that she passed was filled with costermongers' stalls, and gave a wonderful glimpse of a night-market at its busiest: pavements and roadway filled; a black crowd with fiery red faces as they turned beneath the naphtha flares; and a confused roar of many voices that could be heard for a hundred yards along the main thoroughfares, above the grinding sounds of the trams, the sharp rattle of cab-wheels, and the far-off thunder of the railway

trains crossing the great bridge that spanned the street at its end. Going under the railway bridge and leaving the tram lines, she came out into a quieter neighbourhood: streets of closed shops, with here and there a warehouse, and one short series of private houses. At a corner where four streets met, there was an immense new music-hall, looking white and unsubstantial in the false daylight thrown by powerful arc lamps, with a cupola that rose high above the stone parapet and was surmounted by a brazier, from which poured forth orange flames that made a patch of the soft grey sky seem black as ink. This music-hall, with its beacon showing far and wide over the roofs of the houses, was a useful landmark. Going round the music-hall, down a short side street, she came out at once into Cuthbert Street, and in a few paces reached her home—Pring's, Fancy Draper, etc.—now close-shuttered and at rest after the weary day's work.

Mr. Pring himself, in shirt-sleeves, smoking a pipe and freely perspiring, opened the door in response to the weak tinkling sounds of the bell.

'Good evening, miss.'

'Good evening, sir—'

'You're lucky—able to get a breath of fresh air—I'm in the thick of it still."

Through an open door one could see the dark shop, and behind it, a gaslit room, walls of green cardboard boxes, an open bureau and a table piled with papers.

'I say. Miss Shelton'; and Mr. Pring called after her as she went upstairs. 'If Miss Millar hasn't gone to bed, ask her to step down. I wish to speak to her. . . . Did you hear what I said?'

'Yes sir.'

'Thank you. Not if she's gone to bed, you know.'

The atmosphere was appallingly hot and close. As she went up the steep stairs, there floated upward with her an abominable mixture of unwelcome odours: gas, cooking, dust, drains, the prevailing perfume of the stock itself, made by the conquering gloves and stockings, and the fragrance of Mr. Pring's pipe. A girl on a landing said she would deliver the message to Miss Millar.

'Oh yes, I daresay,' and she laughed, and Vivien heard her open a door and speak to Miss Millar.

'Sign says he can't sleep without he sees you again. No rot. He really says you was to go down. He told the Princess to tell you.'

Vivien slept on the top floor, in the biggest bedroom in the

house, with three other girls. A terribly hot room it was in this glorious June weather. The sloped ceiling would have told one that it was just beneath the slates without the corroborative voice of prowling cats. There was only one window, and until the last candle was put out it was necessary to have the blind down, because close in front of the window stood the back wall of the music-hall, and at a window—presumably of a dressing-room—'artistes' or scene-shifters were known to stand prying. It was the duty of her who last used lighted candle to pull up the blind. In accordance with the rules of the shop each girl was allowed to keep one trunk in the room, and Vivien's big box, covered with the bed-spread that she had used at Mrs. Kearsley's, was a very conspicuous piece of furniture. There was one chest of drawers for the joint use of the four girls; and one looking-glass was provided by the establishment. On the mantelpiece there were medicine bottles containing various quack nostrums: those much-advertised cures for the hydra-headed demon of indigestion which dominates the unhealthy lives of London shop-girls. Above the mantelpiece there was a highly decorated religious placard, nailed to the wall by the pious hands of some forgotten inmate of the room. 'Waking and sleeping He is with you,' were the opening words of this illuminated and illuminating message. There were two good-sized iron bedsteads; and, by great good fortune, Vivien's place was in the bed near the window.

Vivien's bedfellow, Miss Ellenberger, a big Jewish-looking girl, was already asleep. She lay with her big nose buried in the pillow, and she breathed stertorously and muttered in her sleep. Vivien soon took her place by Miss Ellenberger's side, and, with a candle on a chair between the wall and the bed, began to read a novel that she had borrowed from the free library.

'How that girl snores. Dreaming of her mash I suppose?'

'Dreaming of her spiffs I should think.'

'Sooner you than me, Princess. Don't it give you the creeps to 'ear her talk? I 'eard 'er the other night—in the middle of the night—and it fairly gave me the 'orrors.'

Vivien made no reply to this inquiry.

'Miss Shelton. You don't mind us calling you Princess, do you? We all 'ave our nicknames.'

'No, I do not care in the least what you call me.'

One of the girls—Miss Moulton—in her nightgown, was sitting on the side of her bed; and, having rolled down an india-rubber bandage, was carefully painting the varicose veins on the calf of her leg with a camel's-hair brush that she had dipped in

an enormously advertised preparation. The other girl—Miss Culley—slowly undressing, was telling her some endless story about one of her young men—resuming the relation no matter how often she was interrupted.

'"I don't value her," he says, "not *that*," and he snaps his fingers. "Well," I says, "when you are with *'er*, p'raps you 'll say you don't value me," and I snaps my fingers. He looked that foolish I laughed in his face. "Very good," he says, "I will now escort you 'ome for the last time." "Oh," I said, "do not trouble yourself," I said. He could not stand me laughing. That's what men can't stand—laughing at them'; and so on.

''Ark!' said Miss Moulton at last. 'What was that? Old Sign's voice! Best be quiet now, or he'll be sending Mrs. Schofield to shut us up—or coming up himself. Is that door locked?'

Then they, too, lay down to rest.

'Princess,' whispered Miss Culley drowsily. 'It's your turn to pull up the blind to-night.'

Lying in the darkened room one could see the ceiling faintly illumined by the light from the music-hall window; one could hear men's voices in the dressing-rooms and passages; one could hear quite plainly the music of the orchestra, the clapping of hands and drumming of feet of the audience at the end of a song. Miss Moulton and Miss Culley were sleeping now. They were half-dead with fatigue each night, and sleep came the minute their heads touched their pillows. It was a poor fitful sleep, a feverish unconsciousness after too much work, not the deep river of oblivion that woos the idle and the healthy to its silent depths; and nearly all the girls talked aloud as they slept. The Jewess was moaning and groaning now in a horrible fashion. Vivien very softly and slowly moved her head and shoulders into a different position, and soon she ceased to groan and only snored. Presently the band in the music-hall played 'God Save the Queen': the performance was over; a shuffling of many feet on stone steps lasted for a few minutes as the audience in the gallery came down into the street; and then there was silence.

How silent the great house at Hawkridge would be on such a night as this! The long terrace would be glittering whitely though there was no moon; on this short summer night there would be no true darkness down there; the cypresses, the orange trees, would seem to be carved in stone and hung with shrouds of grey velvet. Through the big windows would come the perfume of flowers, and perhaps a faint sweet wind—the

pure cool breath of the distant sea. Only by what she had known could she measure the depth of her misery.

She had been reading *David Copperfield* till the time had come to blow out the candle: and she thought now of David among the wine-bottles, and felt all that he had felt. Thus it was to be always—without one ray of hope. An endless sordid drudgery among these poor sordid slaves, these soulless, brainless, *h*-less sufferers who did not even feel their degradation, who were born and bred to this disgrace, and who could not sink to despair because they had never risen to hope.

This was life without a dream.

She had thought of herself as one of a thousand girls, but it seemed that she was one of ten thousand, one of ten hundred thousand girls, all eagerly seeking their daily bread. She had been away from London for less than two years, and yet all her little world had changed, every living being who might have helped her had disappeared. She wanted to find Miss Crofts, the workwoman. Miss Crofts would have put her in the way of employment. But at Wardrop Limited no one had ever heard of Miss Crofts. Wardrop's once empty window was filled with blouses; upstairs, where poor Mrs. Carey had played out her little tragedy, Wardrop's had a lingerie department; there were coarse young men, and quite common girls dressed in a hideous travesty of the old blouse-uniform; it was no longer an amateur shop, and they could not entertain any offers of amateurs' assistance. Clara and Mr. Pritchard she might have reached by writing to Brent and Cooper's, but somehow she could not ask for any aid from Clara and her husband. Marian and her dear had sailed away across half the world. Miss Brierley with all her clever friends had gone from Malplaquet Buildings. Even Mrs. Kearsley had gone. The cruel tide of life had flowed over Marefield Street: of all the footprints she had known not one was visible.

At the amateur shops—bonnet-shops, shirt-shops, flower-shops, dress-shops, tea-shops—the pound a week was refused her. Trade was good, but there were more girls than pounds. She might leave her address if she liked, and go down as a three-figure number on their long waiting list. Did she think it probable that she would be able to introduce any capital? That would naturally make a difference. Trade in the amateur shops was so good just now that there were exceptionally fine openings for idle capital—any amount of it.

Then she tried the real shops, answering advertisements and

paying visits. But at the big milliners and drapers they laughed at her for her simplicity. She was asking for work, and she had never learned her business. She had never passed through the ordinary stages—apprentice, improver, and so on—she had never even heard the terms of the real shop-girl's initiation. As to all the child's play at Mrs. Wardrop's—she could, they told her, have only acquired at Mrs. Wardrop's a knowledge of how not to do it. Once or twice, there seemed a glimmer of hope. At a large establishment in Regent Street, the name of Wardrop stimulated a faint interest. She was brought before one of the members of the firm and questioned. For the sake of argument: suppose that he placed her in their new blouse department, could she draw some of the old Wardrop custom? For instance, had she provided herself with a full and accurate list of the names and addresses of all Mrs. Wardrop's customers? She was obliged to confess that she had not provided herself with anything at all.

She spent her money and her time, for over a week, in striving for some sort of secretarial work. But here the press was thickest of all: not one in twenty of the letters that she wrote was answered. She was living in a house near Westbourne Park, and she was allowed to use the address of the newspaper shop kept by her landlord. The newsman gave her good advice as to the different advertising organs. If she was thinking of a situation as companion or secretary, she could not do better than study the *Morning Post* or *Daily Telegraph*; but if she was working the millinery or drapery line, *The Christian World* was the thing for her. It was after reading the advertisements of would-be secretaries and clerks that she renounced any further effort in this direction. This was how the pound-seekers spoke of themselves: 'Accustomed to work with phonograph and typewriter combined. Short h. 200 a minute. Write grammatically Fr. Ger. and Ital., understand and speak Span. Used to making abstracts and condensed reports and keep accurate minutes of meeting or discussion. Cheerful, healthy and not afraid of work. Miss S. K. No. 2561.' What could she say for herself among such competitors? Improvident dreamer, in her long hours of slothful ease, she had failed to prepare herself for life-work. In a year in that restful library she could have learnt shorthand. Mr. Frensham, instead of filling her with windy philosophy, might have taught her the rudiments of book-keeping; she might have hired one of those type-writing machines which she now saw were freely offered on hire; she might have laboured steadily at her scrappy German and French—she might have fitted herself for some mean office,

been ready to be of some use to some one in some obscure corner of the mighty town. Gradually the stern truth came home to her. She was sinking to her natural value in the open labour market, and that was—nothing at all.

Yet, as she knew, there was, could she reach it, a small inner circle of employers to whom she had something to offer, and with whom her incapacity would be held almost as a merit. There must be, could she but find them, hundreds of old widows—insignificant social units when compared with the great Lady Colwyn—who kept a lady-companion, if not a lady-in-waiting. She could write their letters, go for drives with them: some of them might even like to have Dickens read aloud to them—and she could do that without dropping her *h*'s or using the Cockney accent in any passages but those in which the Cockney accent was plainly indicated by the author. But here fate had been unkind. In approaching the inner circle she would be an applicant without a 'character.' Sooner or later in any such negotiation it must come to this: 'Trouble because of the young man of the house? Then I fear I must wish you good morning, Miss Shelton.'

She would rather starve than refer any one to Lady Colwyn. But she would not starve. The thought of the friend who depended on her must serve to give her courage. She must fight for him as well as for herself. It might be a bitterly hard struggle alone, an almost impossible struggle for the two of them, but she would not fail him.

She would not ask help from Lady Colwyn or from any one of Lady Colwyn's world. Lady Augusta would help her, Mrs. Gardiner had told her to come for help, but she would never go to them. She could not face them. She could not face any one who knew Lord Helensburgh and had known her at Hawkridge—except one. Had it been possible, she could have gone to the great Scottish lord and his squat little wife, and, without a doubt or any sense of humiliation, have asked for assistance. That grand Scottish prince would have taken her hand and looked into her eyes and believed that she was worthy to be welcomed within his granite walls. He would no more have changed than the old walls themselves. She could not doubt him, and he would not have doubted her. But the great Lord Stonehaven was watching the death-bed of his wife, and she thought with a tear, not of self-pity, of his words: 'Life is uncertain, but we do not change—my wife and I.'

In this time her big box was growing lighter. She was coming to the end of that small balance of her salary and was selling her clothes—first, all that she could do without; then, the

things that she had determined that she must not part with. Week after week was gliding by. Then, all at once, her first stroke of luck came. Presenting herself at a new lady's tea-shop in Kensington High Street, in two minutes she found herself engaged. The pound a week was hers for a fortnight, possibly for three weeks. One of the young ladies was ill: Vivien was to fill her place until she recovered. The invalid was a niece of the management, and, for this reason only, the place was to be kept for her. To be fairly near her work, Vivien came back to Marefield Street; and, sinking down many grades of her old social ladder, obtained a room for herself and her companion at a greengrocer's dangerously near the bottom of the street; and at this wicked little den she ran the risk of losing her box altogether.

The first night she slept in peace; but on the second, pandemonium reigned. A male lodger, coming in drunk and yet anxious to be more drunk still, brought two bottles of whisky with him and gradually involved the whole house in riot. There were women lodgers, who talked and sang and shouted till it was nearly light, and then a general row broke out in which the greengrocer beat the women with a free hand, and the greengrocer's wife cried murder until the man knocked her senseless. Through Vivien's door the greengrocer vowed that if Imp the dog continued to bark as he had been barking throughout the shindy, he would smash the door and come in and brain him.

Yet, in the morning, the greengrocer and his bruised helpmate were in complete accord, refusing to admit that anything had occurred to justify Vivien in leaving them, swearing by heaven and earth that she had taken the room for a month and that they would be torn limb from limb rather than allow the box to go until she had paid them for the full month. Now, for the first time, she experienced that comfort so often extolled by Mrs. Kearsley: the propinquity of the police-station. The sergeant in charge sent one of his reserves with her to extract the box; and at last she and the box and the dog rolled away in a four-wheeler.

The reserve was an intelligent young officer. He told her that she had been in a really bad house. Nearly all the houses at the bottom of Marefield Street were bad. He drew an imaginary line a little way below Malplaquet Buildings, and told her that beyond this line you came upon dangerous ground: above the line you need have no fear, you were as safe as in Park Lane. The reserve also suggested the bricklayer's wife as a suitable and trustworthy landlady, and declined to accept any gratuity. But in spite of the policeman's honourable obedience

to the regulations of the force, the total cost of this disastrous move ran away with the better part of the first of her tea-shop pounds.

She did not wish that the sick young lady might not recover, but she did truly wish that the poor girl might come into a fortune and thus not desire to resume her place and her pounds. But no such happy chance befell. At the end of the three weeks the convalescent returned and gave the substitute her freedom again.

The young ladies of this tea-shop were drawn from a social class below that of your true amateur tea-shop hand, and amongst them Vivien met a useful adviser. This girl had once been in 'the millinery,' and most of her friends were drapers' and milliners' assistants. She advised Vivien not to try the big establishments, but to look out for a chance at a small shop. She considered that the chances at this period of the year, when all the season engagements had long since been made in the West End trade, would lie to the north and the north-west. Vivien should not look for anything south of the Euston and Marylebone Roads, but should most assiduously beat the vast country that lay to the north of those artificial barriers.

'There,' said Miss Norris, putting a grubby finger on an advertisement, 'that 's a likely chance.'

Vivien had come back one broiling afternoon when the tea-shop was empty, between lunch and tea-time; and, having ordered a cup of coffee for the good of the house, had spread out her *Christian World* upon the table. Sitting by her side, this kind and experienced Miss Norris had been carefully going through the narrow columns.

'There,' and she licked her pencil and marked the advertisement. 'Pring, Cuthbert Street. That 's the likeliest chance in that lot. It 's a small shop—first, because I 've never heard of it; and second, because he says "serve through"—I 'd try it without losing another minute. . . . Good-bye dear, and good luck.'

Vivien made her way at once into the north.

'I am a good saleswoman.'

'You are, are you?'

In the room behind Mr. Pring's shop she repeated this statement again and again.

'I am a good saleswoman. Mrs. Wardrop always said so.'

'You have struck me very lucky,' said Mr. Pring, 'or I tell you frank I wouldn't have entertained it.'

'There 's nothing that I can't learn in two days. In a week I promise that—'

'You do, do you?' and Mr. Pring ran his fingers through his beard. 'But I don't see as you can expect me to pay you while you're learning one end of my shop from the other.'

'I will come for the first week for nothing. I am a good saleswoman. Mrs. Wardrop said so.'

Then Mr. Pring asked many questions. He must have a reference, and in her need she gave him the name of Mr. Pritchard of Brent and Cooper's. This seemed to impress Mr. Pring. He knew all about Brent and Cooper's; but had not the pleasure of Mr. Pritchard's acquaintance. But Mr. Pritchard had known her at Mrs. Wardrop's? He might write to Mr. Pritchard to-night if he liked?

'Look here,' said Mr. Pring, and he laid his hand upon her arm. 'I shan't write to him. If I take you, it's upon your good behaviour,' and he laughed; 'and if I'm wrong, it's not the first time my soft heart has led me astray where your sex are concerned,' and Mr. Pring laughed again.

In this manner Vivien hit off the lucky chance at Pring's, and obtained the situation at fifteen pounds a year after first week; to be paid 'monthly'; to 'live in'; and to 'serve through.'

XXXIV

IT was a very real shop. From the 7.30 bell in the morning to the bread-and-cheese supper at half-past eight at night, there was nothing amateurish, no elegant trifling: all was stern reality.

There were two counters, and the full strength consisted of five girls at each counter, but just before Vivien came there had been a row, and three young ladies had walked out of Pring's in the firm belief that it would be impossible not to better themselves in any situations that might fall to them. Miss Shelton, as a new comer, naturally took the lowest place, at the end of a counter far from the door. But when, in a day or two, another girl, Miss Watson, was engaged, she could not complain because Miss Watson went over her head, since Miss Watson was an adept and she herself was blindly struggling with the mystery of the fancy drapery. The place of Miss Russell—tall, thin, and thirty-five—was next the door, and she 'took first sales.' This phrase meant that Miss Russell, if she cared to exercise it, had the right to claim any customer. The precedence in serving was no empty honour, because it was the system of the shop to pay premiums on sales—a matter of one and a quarter per cent.: so that the more one served the more were one's additional earnings in premiums—or spiffs, as the girls, without in the least knowing why, called them. But Miss Russell was buyer for the millinery department and was often absent; and when present was occupied by varied tasks: such as helping Mr. Pring to dress the window, check invoices, make out tickets, etc. Hence, Miss Stothard, who took next sales, had nothing to whine about: *she* did all right. From Stothard onward, the table of precedence was strictly governed by the dates of the entry of the young ladies into Pring's.

The stock consisted of what are known as light goods or 'fancy'—gloves, lace, ribbons, chiffons, collars, cuffs, falls, etc.; a little hosiery; furs, hats, ladies' and childrens' outfittings. A few dress lengths were kept, but only as a special line. It might be said also of the blouses, dressing-gowns, imitation jewellery, buttons, links, studs, etc., that, strictly speaking, all these were

extra lines. The real trade was the regular light goods—the cheapest trash imaginable, affording the most trifling profit, but tending to the highest possible speed in turnover. With regard to commercial scheme: 'cut and cut' was at once Mr. Pring's motto and his challenge to rivals great and small.

Vivien, effacing herself on the advent of custom, attentively watching her neighbour, helping to get down the black boxes of tawdry rubbish, eagerly scanning bills, strenuously urging a recalcitrant memory to retain the trumpery trade names and the pitiful ticket figures, doggedly set herself to overcome the mystery. You had to 'serve through'—the meaning of these mystic words being that you must know the entire contents of the shop and not relinquish your customer until you had supplied her with all that she wanted or you could persuade her that she ought to want. There was much to learn. But soon, by reason of close observation, example and precept, advice and ridicule, with gossip unceasing—mealtime chatter, bedroom chatter,—the mystery unfolded itself: the shop gave up its mean little secrets, the routine and conduct of a cheap, bad shop stood revealed in all its ugliness. She kept her very audacious promise. Within a week she knew her work.

This was the progress of the hours at Pring's. The breakfast bell rang at 8 o'clock for breakfast—bread and butter, tea or coffee. At 8.30 the business bell rang, and one was expected to be in one's place to dress out the shop, dust and brush the show goods and decorate the shop generally. Mr. Pring, who was his own buyer—for everything but the hats,—his own shop-walker, was also his own window-dresser, and on such days as he attempted something striking in window-dressing he made all the world suffer. With a toothpick in his mouth he issued curt orders to Miss Russell, who handed him the blocks and articles, and behind her all who were free were forced to 'dance attendance.' He never said please, and he never said thank you, and he made an unintermitting noise with his toothpick. Often, after two hours' work, when not in the vein, flogging his brain, but without inspiration, he would pull the window to pieces and begin all again. Sometimes the task would drag on until three in the afternoon. But when, after these great and protracted efforts, he was satisfied that he had achieved something big, the window 'stood' for as long as a week or even ten days. Woe betide any one who, in replacing articles sold from the window, should play havoc with the Guv'nor's set-out.

At 1.15 the dinner bell rang for the first dining-party, and half the staff went down to their dinner—hot and cold meat on alternate days. At two o'clock the bell rang again and, the

first party having returned with flushed faces, the second dining-party, faint and pale and hungry, descended in their turn. You belonged to first party one week and to second the next: the composition of the parties remained the same week after week so that you always had the same table-companions. Mr. Pring dined with and carved for the first party; Mrs. Schofield the cook-housekeeper presided over the second party; and her husband, the packer, warehouseman, sweeper, watchman, handy-man, etc., sometimes occupied a seat at the board. Although you had to wait so long for your dinner, the second party was the more popular.

'Miss Shelton,' Mr. Pring would murmur when carving, 'do you wish any fat?' and if one's attention had wandered, or one did not catch the polite inquiry, he would bellow irefully:—

'I am asking you, Miss Shelton, if you wish any fat.'

'No thank you, sir.'

The fact was: during this oppressive summer no one wished any fat on hot meat days.

At 5 o'clock and 5.20 the tea bells rang; at eight o'clock Mr. Schofield pulled out the shutters—for a quarter of an hour previously, unless serving, one had been furtively tidying-up; and in another half-hour the supper bell rang, and one was usually free to go down and enjoy the bread and cheese (no butter) and one's glass of ale—if one was fond of ale. There were of course no seats behind the counters, and, after standing with only two rests for twelve hours, one's feet and legs were always tired.

'Yes,' said Miss Culley, once when chaffed, 'it's all very fine to talk about cats on 'ot bricks, but I tell you straight when I pulled me stocking off just now it fairly made me cry. My right foot is just one blister.'

Mr. Pring liked the sound of the bells. He had been at the great Oxford Street house, Bishop and Vine's, and there had learnt all that he knew. He had founded all his rules, system of fines, premiums, everything—including his bell-law—on Bishop and Vine's mighty organisation. If his shop was empty when the dinner bell sounded, he would bellow out 'First party dinner' in stentorian tones, and stand watching the tiny procession, perhaps seeing it in imagination swollen into a vast tramping crowd that made the passages echo to a thousand footsteps, when, after filtering down through a dozen departments, it neared his immense subterranean banqueting hall.

In truth a man of disappointed ambitions. Seven years gone, but really nothing done—and he had come here hoping to capture the whole street; had walked about numbering his

houses, turning out his neighbours to give space to his irresistible expansion, cut—cut—cutting till none could stand against him; building high in the air a long row of castles, glass-domed, steel-girdered, veneered with granite, porphyry, and marble, with a gilt flagstaff—nay, perhaps a captive balloon to carry the name of Pring heavenwards. Now, after seven years, he was, it was said, in thought reduced to this abandonment of lofty aim: to divide his shop, give one counter over to the Manchester trade and own that he is beaten. If he goes into 'the heavy,' it is good-bye to his splendid hopes: for not from the heavy, but from the light foundations are such castles as he has seen in thought-trances ever reared.

Whether he were thus thwarted by fate or not—and already the scheme of revolution was covertly discussed by the staff—this much was certain concerning Mr. Pring: he was uniquely odious, truly unworthy of pity or sympathy, without one trait to redeem, one slightest grace to palliate his hatefulness. Squat, stout, red-haired, pale and at seasons pimply, Sign was a little, mean, cruel beast of a man about whom the girls had tales to tell that turned one sick as, against one's will, one heard them.

'He is,' said Miss Moulton, 'take it from me, Princess, an 'oly terror if he gets a fancy to yer—pawing yer about. That 's 'is beginnings—puts 'is 'and on yer shoulder, or pats you on the back, or give you a sly dig with 'is toothpick. Well, you know, that 's 'is beginnings.'

But happily, Miss Moulton added, he is at this moment courting sly Miss Millar—the Dough-nut, as we call her. The pats and pawings are hers just now, and the rest of the shop is free from the terror.

They dealt largely in nicknames—as Miss Culley had said, they were all called out of their names. Sign was Sign for obvious reasons. Little Miss Gregory, the unhappy girl in the cash desk, was called the Skeleton in the Cupboard for a very sad reason. Vivien was called the Princess for a fantastic reason. At the period of her arrival, a certain continental princess had deserted her exalted husband, and mysteriously disappeared. All the papers were busy with conjectures about the royal fugitive: she had gone to Venice, to Lucerne, to Copenhagen; she had come to England, the asylum of the unhappy, and was about to throw herself at the feet of the Queen and plead for pardon and divorce—and so on. When Miss Shelton dropped, as it were, from the skies into Pring's, and betrayed the fact that she was anything but at home behind the counter, Miss Stothard wittily enough announced her con-

viction that the neophyte was none other than the missing princess. But Miss Shelton was more than the princess of Pring's. She was also called 'the City Trotter.' This was, however, rather a specific description than a true nickname.

'You may be sure,' said some one, 'that he'll turn you into his city trotter.'

Miss Shelton, waiting, watching, refusing to ask for explanations if she could avoid disclosing the depth of her ignorance, waited for this new term to explain itself in due course, and duly found the forecast to come true.

The heaviest fines were all incurred when you were serving. It cost you sixpence, for instance, to go up to your bedroom without leave in the day time; but any mismanagement of or gross blunder with your black-covered bill-book left you minus a shilling at the least, and perhaps as much as two shillings. If you had an accident with one of your fifty numbered bills and their duplicates, you must call for Sign, whisper a humble apology, and get him to sign the accident as void, then you must mark 'void' on the corresponding space in the check-sheet in the front of the book and go and hand the cancelled bill and duplicate to the desk clerk; and thus—the accident confessed and recorded—you were pardoned. The slightest infringement of this, your correct behaviour in the face of disaster, was punished by the colossal fine of half-a-crown.

But the heaviest fine of all—three shillings—was for allowing the customer who would not buy anything to leave the shop before you reported the matter to the shopwalker. In the hour wherein Vivien learned the meaning of the words 'city trotter,' she nearly permitted herself to be mulcted in these swinging damages.

A lady with a dirty little bit of frayed ribbon could not be supplied with some more of the same sort—but clean, of course. Miss Moulton, kindly helping to pull down the boxes, told Vivien the thing was hopeless, and the lady was clasping her greasy bag, was on the point of abandoning her chair, when Miss Moulton gave Vivien the office to call Sign, and 'Sign' Vivien desperately called.

''Arf a moment madam,' said Miss Moulton suavely as Mr. Pring approached.

'What can we do for madam?' said Mr. Pring, smiling and rubbing his hands. 'Be seated, madam, I beg.'

Vivien, leaning across the counter, explained rather breathlessly.

'Madam desires an exceptionally wide peach-blossom in lutestring.'

'Or Gross de Napplis,' said the lady, 'I don't care what you call it, but you ain't got it so there's an end of it.'

'I have told madam,' said Vivien, 'that if she will be good enough to leave us the pattern, we can certainly match it.'

'Oh match my foot,' said madam very curtly.

Nevertheless, beneath the smiles and bows of Mr. Pring, the lady was soothed, and persuaded to open her bag again.

'Fortunately,' said Mr. Pring looking at the shop clock and then at his own watch, 'the day is young. We will match it before nightfall, madam. Shall we send it to madam's address —two and a half, thank you,—or will madam call? Has madam seen the latest in lace scarves? Forward with those Tambours, Miss Shelton. . . . Thank you, madam. Good morning, madam. You may rely on our matching it without fail.'

'There,' said Mr. Pring, tossing the bit of ribbon scornfully from him when the lady had gone. 'Pick it up Miss Shelton— put on your hat and off you go,' and he scribbled and signed an order on one of his bill-heads. 'Greenhouse, Wood Street—or Barraclough and Bowls, St. Paul's Churchyard. If you can't do it there, Johnson and Parrott, Hallidays', or Stevensons.' . . . Not so fast. Look here,' and Mr. Pring brought out his leather purse. 'There's the tram and the bus—say twopence each way,' and he counted out the pennies and halfpence. 'There you are. Off you go, and don't be all day about it.'

Vivien, before going, stole down into the little workroom behind the kitchen where the workgirl retrimmed, altered, and 'dodged-up' the cheap hats, and obtained some more explicit information as to the process of matching at the wholesale houses. The workgirl reinstated the names which had gone out of one ear even as Mr. Pring fired them in at the other, gave a description of method, and added a few pencilled notes lest the Princess should forget again; and then Vivien went trotting. And henceforth she was sent on all such expeditions.

City-trotting was a despised and menial office, but she did not dislike it. Fresh air, change of scene, a ride on the top of omnibus and tram, with another world that she had never explored rolling out for scrutiny and observation; the black-coated press in the city; St. Paul's Churchyard, with its strange sense of peace amidst the business struggle, its burning asphalt, and its stagnant atmosphere fanned into movement by the beating wings of the pigeons—all things that made a break from the slow march of the Pring day must do one good. The great wholesale houses were scenes of excitement if one chanced to come on show-day, when the long counters were furnished forth with stock, and salesmen behind them and travellers in front of

them sought with a curious abruptness—very different to the urbane servility of the retail shops—to obtain orders from the wandering buyers. The bedrock, logical objection to city-trotting was that, while doing it, you were not serving, and of course your spiffs were going to the devil. That was really why no experienced young lady wanted to trot. A further objection, peculiar to Pring's, was that Sign's estimate of travelling expenses was below the mark. You could not ride to within striking distance of Wood Street for twopence. Once, when rated for protracted absence, Vivien apologising said that she had been obliged to walk a considerable distance. Mr. Pring appeared to give weight to this excuse, but he did not subsequently increase the dole from the leather purse.

Truly all this matching, as she understood, was vexation and annoyance to Mr. Pring: a process from which no direct profit could be gleaned, a hard necessity of his trade in order to hold custom and maintain reputation. If you did not freely match, at the customers' own figures, cost what it might, customers would float away for ever. He was giving the time of his trotter: if he gave her full bus-fares also, it would be too much of a good thing.

There was a certain corner where the omnibuses halted, and where the pavement was given over to flower-girls and newspaper men. Here, on her journeys, she used to read the display-bills, learning in the brief pause all she could of passing events of importance, and drinking in the wafted perfume from the flower baskets. She saw no newspaper at Pring's, and throughout this long summer kept herself abreast of public affairs by the aid of newspaper contents-bills. 'Unrest in South Africa!' It was a most uneventful period—never anything really interesting; and all the papers, in the dearth of good news, seemed obliged to fall back on stupid old Africa, about which no one on earth cared. 'Bloemfontein Congress,' 'Mr. Kruger's proposals,' 'Mr. Chamberlain on the Transvaal'—and so on and so forth. Who cared? Not Vivien, never a soul on her bus, not one of the languid men in the crowded street below.

One day, however, at her corner there was a line on the bills that swept the stream of her thoughts into a channel across which she had built with infinite pains a mental dam that she had hoped would resist any conceivable external pressure. Now, in a moment, the thought-stream had forced a breach and was trickling, then cascading, then deeply flowing down the forbidden course.

'Serious illness of the Duke of Morecambe.'

Sitting on her omnibus garden-seat, grasping her parcel lest it

should be jolted out of her hand, she thought of him softly wheeled out upon his terrace above the rolling waves of the western ocean—an old, old man, a shivering old king now letting orb and sceptre slip from cold and nerveless fingers, a grand old lamp in which the small tended flame begins to leap and flicker. She thought, too, of the heir to all the empty honours. Not long to wait till my lord reigns over all the barren realm. In imagination she sees him, bareheaded, clothed in black, walking slowly beneath grey walls as he follows the staggering men and the purple pall; in imagination she hears the solemn music in the lofty chapel of this palace of Culverlands that she has never seen. The Earl of Helensburgh, she thinks, will never make his parliamentary *début*. It will be the Duke of Morecambe who will rise in his place next February to move the address on the Queen's speech. A letter of condolence perhaps will come to Hawkridge to be added to Lady Colwyn's cherished collection. An astonishing compliment from the house by the Solent. 'In her own hand—every word of it. Have you seen it, miss? You should ask her to show it to you.'

The omnibus carried her, lost in thought, far past the junction of the tram lines where she should have got down. She was in a strange country, far away to the north-east, when the conductor roused her for another penny. And on this occasion, when Mr. Pring chid her for being disgracefully late, she accepted the rebuke in silence: really she had no valid excuses to offer.

The shop had surrendered the mean little secrets of its dull routine: of a shop-girl's business life there was no more to learn.

The food was villainously bad, almost uneatable except for the bread on some days—when Miss Crofts had extolled shop-fare she must have had in her mind the great west-end shops and not such remotely humble establishments as this. The house was stiflingly unhealthy; the basement was like a gas oven by night, like the ill-lit recesses of a sewerage tunnel by day; the work was crushingly severe; the pay was hopelessly inadequate to allow one to make a hoard against evil days that might in a moment come, since our tenure of office was altogether precarious: dismissal without notice might be given whenever it suited the convenience of the proprietor to be rid of us. But all such disadvantages were the ugly things upon the dark shop-surface: one should be brave and disregard them.

But below the surface, in the blacker depths, lay the ugliness

and cruelty of life itself. Slowly it rose. Look where one would it emerged, forcing one to see, to think, to understand—a monstrous towering force, personified by vague memories as a veiled figure, but showing us now cold, pitiless, gazing eyes through its dusky shrouds, and filling us with sudden horror, not of its new lair, this sordid shop, but of itself.

This little red-bearded man one must think of, if one thought at all, as a treacherous, implacable sultan basely ruling his helpless subjects, all these girls. There was a disgusting, soul-sickening thought: yet no morbid fancy, the truth. Miss Russell—thin and gaunt and thirty-five—had once been the sultan's favourite. It was said that she loved him. There was an ugly thought. He was a widower. Making the traditional draper's marriage, he had mated with a clever milliner, but the married life had been unhappy and the wife had soon died. He will not marry again, although Miss Russell hopes that, when the volcano fires are burnt out, he may return to his old allegiance, and that the last chapter of her miserable love-tale will close to the music of wedding bells. Meantime, as with pinched lips she watches his periodic love-making, traces infallibly the stages that lead to each new consummation of his infidelity, she suffers a dumb agony. Not dumb always—one Sunday morning Vivien hears her behind the locked bedroom door sobbing in hysterical torment.

Poor little Miss Gregory—who sits all day in the cash desk, lives out, munches hard biscuits at dinner-time inside her wooden box—is not even given tea by the shop. She has aged parents to support and must take all her money home. She is so fearfully anæmic that they say she has shed her toe nails. Her thumb nail is gone, but there is no blood to come to the wound. Sometimes she coughs so violently that her little prison-house shakes and seems to totter, and when the fit has passed she leans back almost fainting. She is known by all to be consumptive as well as anæmic. A doctor has told her that tuberculosis is not necessarily fatal. She would still have a chance if removed from the dust and the gas and the endless toil to a charitable institution where food, open air, and rest are supplied at the lowest possible charge per week. But the family cannot spare their little breadwinner, so the chance must be denied her. All the shop knows that she is doomed, and that is why they call her the Skeleton in the Cupboard.

The ugliness of life is shown again by a painted girl who loiters sometimes on the pavement outside the shop. Her real beat is from the corner to the railway bridge, and she is an unflinching patron of the music-hall whenever she can afford

to purchase a ticket. Miss Russell and some of the girls know this Miss Gertie Payne quite well. She used to serve side by side with them; then she disappeared; and at last '*went on.*' Miss Moulton, explaining, speaks of the streets as one might speak of the stage—a lamentable profession for young ladies, but one to which one may be driven by circumstances over which one has no control. Some time before Gertie went on, she had pleased the roving eye of Mr. Pring. 'That was her beginnings.' Sign has recently threatened her with police interference if she hangs about his doors before the shutters are up and the business day is over.

And in the dead middle of the night, Miss Ellenberger the Jewess can, when the others sleep, make one miserably conscious that the ugliness of life has once thrown those stifling veils about our quaking bed-fellow.

Miss Ellenberger, in sleep oblivious of the faith of her fathers, calls on the name of Christ, terrifying one with the cold certainty of tragedy—making one almost read the tragic memory hidden beneath the heavy eyelids.

'For Christ's sake let me go! . . . For the love of Jesus, let me go—now!!'

Shaken by the arm, turned over on her side, Miss Ellenberger lies bathed in perspiration, moaning and shivering, but does not wake.

Shivering also, Vivien lies down again—lies awake now till the daylight comes creeping upon the ceiling—and thinks. The thought has come to her of the cry of that small boy on the slimy rocks at Southbourne when she too was a child. 'Pax, give me pax.'

Oh but for our poor little dog it must come to that: 'Pax, give me pax.' Oh Imp, if anything happens to you, with our own hand we must give ourself pax.

XXXV

ON Sundays the shop anticipated that you would go out for the day. If you had no friends to whom you could go, and therefore desired to spend your Sunday at home, you must give notice of this intention to Mrs. Schofield. Vivien always gave the notice until Mrs. Schofield said that she would henceforth take the notice for granted. The other girls always went away, two or three on Saturday afternoon, the rest on Sunday morning: except Miss Russell, who was away on alternate Sundays.

It was Mr. Pring's custom and pleasure to spend his week-ends at the seaside, but occasionally he remained in London. When Mr. Pring was at home, Mrs. Schofield was compelled to provide Sunday meals of a less picnicky character than usual, but the hours for food then depended altogether on the caprice and convenience of her employer. Breakfast was always late, and dinner might be at any hour up to four o'clock. If you wanted to make sure of your dinner, you must be on the look-out at half-past one, and then wait in patience till Sign came in, and, with a bellow from the street door, gave Mrs. Schofield the signal to dish up.

Mr. Pring would come down to breakfast in full Sunday toilet, except for the frock-coat—in place of which he wore a greasy alpaca jacket above his washing waistcoat, coloured shirt, and satin tie with the imitation diamond in it. He carried his best frock-coat over his arm, and would hang this very carefully upon the back of a chair to allow the creases to work out; and if Miss Russell was present, he would give her his top-hat when tardily he took it off. It was the privilege of Miss Russell, as an expert in hats, to iron and polish it for him before he went out. In the freedom and ease of his alpaca jacket, with a napkin tied round his neck to guard against accidents, he would then manfully attack the dish of liver and bacon or fried eggs that Mrs. Schofield set before him.

Only bread and butter was supplied by the house for the young ladies; but on a side table there were some dusty pots of jam, with two or three tins of potted meat, sardines, and anchovies, exposed for sale and to be purchased should you desire to

improve the shop-fare at your own expense. This Steward's Table, as Mr. Pring pompously called it, was in imitation of the great house of Bishop and Vine's, where the sideboard was like a prosperous little shop and the sales of 'extra-dainties' brought a substantial profit to the caterers.

'Miss Shelton, don't you feel to want a relish with your—?' and filling his mouth, Mr. Pring concluded the sentence with a wave of his fork towards the dusty jam-pots.

'No thank you, sir.'

'Can't understand the way you all neglect my Steward's Table after the trouble I've taken. There don't seem to be a sweet tooth among the lot of you. Give me another cup of tea. Seems I'd better have a clearance sale'—and he pointed, perhaps with his knife this time—'and be done with it. Bread.'

Then, as the hoarse cry of a newspaper boy came faintly to the breakfast party, Miss Russell would be sent upstairs to wait, penny in hand, at the street door to buy Mr. Pring a paper.

'If you will excuse me,' said Miss Russell, having returned and finished her bread and butter.

'Done already? What's all the hurry about?'

'I was thinking of your hat. The iron *is* on.

'Oh never mind the hat—for a minute or two. Open the paper and read us the news. Middle page first—Fashion and Society. After that the telegrams.'

So then, while the man gorged and swilled, gaunt Miss Russell ministered to his intellectual enjoyment.

'The Earl and Countess of Redmoor have left London and are staying at Bournemouth.'

'Don't blame 'em! But Southend's my money in this weather. I call Bournemouth a fuggy 'ole compared to Southend for all they can say.'

'The aged Duke of Morecambe is rapidly sinking.'

'Never heard of him.'

Then, exhausting the world of fashion, Miss Russell obeyed orders by reciting the telegraphed news. In these hot, eventless months there was absolutely nothing worth telegraphing. The interminable and utterly wearisome dispute between the Uitlanders and the Boers was brought forward again and again to fill the empty newsless spaces.

'I'll tell you what,' Mr. Pring said with his mouth perilously full. 'Best thing we can do—is—give 'em a thundering good 'iding. It's what they're asking for. And I'm all for giving it to 'em. . . . B-r-r-r! *'Elp me!* Quick!'

In spite of all precautions an accident had happened. A fragment of egg or liver had gone down between the napkin and the waistcoat.

Miss Russell was busy now with a bowl of warm water, sponge, cloth, and iron. Then, when the waistcoat had been cleansed, she did the hat; and then, going on her knees, she gave Mr. Pring's shining boots a final rub with an old silk handkerchief that was kept in a drawer for this special purpose. If, as was generally the case, a flower had been obtained for Mr. Pring's coat, she neatly pinned it in the lapel for him; and then Mr. Pring, riding on omnibuses and smoking a chain of strong cigars, would make his way south-west to Hyde Park, to mingle at the weekly Church parade with all the fashion and society now remaining in London.

On this day of rest, you were entitled to the free use of your bedroom, and Vivien, left in sole possession of the top room, would willingly have passed the long hours in a restful solitary retirement, but she never disappointed her dog by failing to let him have the good walk that she had promised him on Sundays. When she visited him on week-days she could only lead him for a short stroll along lamp-lit pavements, but on Sundays she could show him sometimes the things that he loved: trees and grass—wide space in which to hunt for absurd dog-treasures, or scamper vainly hoping sooner or later to catch a sparrow.

To-day she determined to take the dog on the long expedition that he always seemed to plead for. This was to the Regent's Park: the splendid area of varied charms—dense jungle, measureless plain, and shining lakes—that is loved by dogs but neglected by fashion. It was a hot day for a dog, but they would walk slowly by the shady side of the streets, and when their goal was reached there would be cool shade under spreading trees, and perhaps a cooler air coming down to them from the northern heights. He knew, almost immediately, whither they were bound: danced, sprang up and licked her hand to thank her, and then began to strain at his lead, and with panting breath plainly told her that postponement of his rapture was insupportable, and that if it made no difference he would be obliged if she could release him at once and he would run on and wait for her by the sea that had the funny ducks for boats on it. With good fortune he would secure a duck by the time that she arrived.

At a queer little shop, near the end of their journey, where was sold tobacco, newspapers, and light refreshments, she shared a glass of milk with him, and bought some biscuits for his holiday dinner. Here she saw the contents-bill of a Sunday

journal that seemed to have later news than was furnished by Mr. Pring's favourite sheet.

'Death of an English Duke.'

In the park the dog enjoyed himself immensely: the charming reality surpassed his excited anticipations. From the moment of her undoing his lead, he refused to have anything to say to her. He was engaged on unfettered dog-business and could not be interfered with: she must keep up with him as best she could. If he caught anything, he promised to bring it to her. He was full of hope of good ground-game in those ornamental thickets. She was very hot and very tired before he confessed that he too was somewhat exhausted, and permitted her to fasten the lead to his collar once more. Then he ate his biscuits, drank at the margin of the lake, and approved of her suggestion to repose oneself, if they could find a shady and an empty bench.

In the distance, the white houses, with all their sun-blinds drawn, seemed to be sunk in a comfortable after-luncheon slumber; lying face downwards on the parched grass, seeking the places where the grass was longest, wretched men and women lay sleeping: tramps, beggars, tattered scarecrows—the incredibly ugly refuse of humanity, looking like dead men washed up from the deep on to this green sunlit shore in the Sunday silence after the week's storm; some nursemaids, moving slowly with their children, had the aspect of sleep-walkers; her dog, with his head looped round her wrist, curled himself sleepily at her feet; the sound of carriage-wheels from the outer drive came with a drowsy rhythm, and in a very few minutes she was asleep herself.

Sleeping deeply, she passed into that solid and least-changing dreamland that lies beyond the outer realm of swift transitions, unsubstantial shapes, and mingling voices. Here, the sleeper may stand on firm ground, to listen and to see, to watch and to wait, until the gates are opened and one enters the soft, warm darkness beyond the threshold. Sleeping thus, she dreamed of the new English duke. As she stood motionless, watching, waiting by the gates, he hurried towards her. From a distance she heard his voice. Faint as a whisper: 'Vivien, Vivien.' Then, as he drew near with outstretched arms, the voice came stronger and stronger, in the words he had used when last she listened to his voice. 'Vivien, come to me—now—now.' Then, in a moment, the outstretched hands had seized hers; he was holding her by the wrists—and then, with a cry on her lips, she woke.

A man's hand was on her arm. One of the ragged ghosts

had risen from the grass, taken a seat by her side, and in her sleep had been hoping to rob her of purse, chain, bangle—anything that he could snatch and run with. The dog Imp—false to his trust—was busily gnawing a blackened crust that the tramp had offered in payment for silence, and watching his new friend as though this was a welcome reinforcement to the little party. The wretched creature shuffled away without a word, and sank again face-downwards on the grass. It had been simply a happy thought, but it had led to nothing. The young lady had awakened too soon. If she desired to give him in charge, here he was, as large as life and as ugly as death, and here she would find him at any moment of the next six hours. Thus he lay, a miserable piece of human wreckage, silently daring her to do her damnedest if she felt any resentment.

'Oh Imp. You might have warned me. You might have barked.'

On this long expedition she had intentionally renounced her own dinner, and when she reached home nothing remained of the shop meal but its peculiarly heavy odour. Tea, however, would soon be served, and after tea came the best time of her week: the quiet hours when, dog-duty performed, she could lie on her bed in the luxurious emptiness of the bedroom and read her brown-covered library novel. Then, if she had recovered from the fatigue of her walk, she could store up fresh vigour with the bread-and-cheese supper, and go out again into the sober, Sunday-evening streets, and, strolling as far as the Margrave Road, have a pleasant half-hour, looking at the magazines in the well-ordered reading-room of the Free Library, and blessing the wise rules that kept this room open on Sunday evening.

This public library was truly a haven of peace for her and a hundred other shop-girls; and out of the library there came to her all at once a wonderful gleam of kindness—an almost dazzling beam from an unrecognised, far-away lantern of kind thought, cheering her, fortifying her, filling her for a little while with a newly discovered consoling strength.

One Saturday night, after visiting the mews and making her weekly payment of the dog's lodging-bill, she went on to the library, and before taking out another book sat at one of the big tables glancing at the illustrated papers. In nearly all of them there were portraits of the late Duke of Morecambe, with pictures of the palatial Culverlands, and a memoir wherein was related his state and his manifold grandeurs—grandeur of wealth, of ancient race, of splendid tradition, etc. Not beneath

the stone flags of his own chapel had they lain him, but in the burial-place of kings by the Thames. The St. Kevernes, said the writer, must be married and buried in Westminster Abbey in accordance with old-time privilege of this family. In one of the papers there was a portrait of the new duke and a memoir of his brief career. She sat for a long time looking at the portrait, but she would not read one word of what could be said about the new duke. She shut the black leather case with a resolute snap and picked up another paper.

Meantime, another reader at the table, a pale little clerk in a pince-nez, had been paying her what he assumed to be well-understood library-compliments. Arranging the leather cases of the journals after the manner of a train of black trucks, he gently pushed his train against her arm from time to time. Then, changing his seat, he winked his glazed eyes with gallant but undetected persistence. Then, in a most businesslike and clerkly manner, he brought out his pocket-pen and wrote upon a flyleaf of paper; and, arranging the paper as the engine of his train, drove it directly in front of her. 'I am going outside to wait for Fair Unknown,' the little clerk announced in a neat round hand. Then, retrieving his paper, he strolled out to wait. He had to wait a long time—until he was tired of waiting probably.

When she had run through these weekly picture-books she went back, past all the screens with the hanging daily prints, to the tables that carried the magazines and reviews. Had she now, or at any time for a month past, chanced to study one of these daily papers she might have seen on the front page of the *Times* or *Morning Post*, or the back page of the *Daily Telegraph*, a much-repeated advertisement: 'Miss V. S. daughter of the late Colonel Richard S. who died in January last is requested to communicate with Messrs. Clifford, Atkinson and George of Lincoln's Inn Fields'; but she never looked at 'the dailies.'

At the counter where the books were given out, there was a shop-girl talking to one of the young librarians.

'Oh, that *is* a good book, Mr. Jones,' said the girl enthusiastically, as she laid down her brown-covered volume. 'Oh it *is* a good book. I only wish you could find me another like it.'

Then she turned to Vivien.

'That *is* a good book. If you want one, you take *that*.'

Vivien picked up the volume. *Where Life flows Deep*; Hopkins! This was the novel about which Lord Rotherfield and the others had talked that night at Hawkridge—a modern novel that was really worth reading. She thanked the girl for

her friendly advice; gave Mr. Jones her library ticket; and by Mr. Jones was permitted to go home with a quite unexpected packet of heart-salve and flattering thought-balm.

The clerk in pince-nez had abandoned all hope of Fair Unknown, and she was suffered to reach Pring's unmolested. Outside the closed shop, Miss Gertie Payne was loitering, arm in arm with a soldier in uniform.

'Oh come on,' said Miss Gertie shrilly. 'There's another hour of it, and the best turns come near the end. Do let's go in.' She was an unflinching patron of the music-hall and hated to be absent from the performance on Saturday night.

Chapter one of Miss Hopkins's much bepraised novel appeared to be a sort of prologue or foreword—or something similar to the banging chords struck by a pianist in a chattering room to attract attention and plead for a hearing. Vivien soon found herself eagerly attending to what Miss Hopkins had to say.

In a baker's shop in a London slum, there was a poor beaten girl—the weak little household drudge, the typical slum servant: an orphan from the Workhouse. With the heart of a dog, perhaps with little more than the intelligence of a dog, she was as helpless as a dog in the hands of a cruel master. Rapidly Miss Hopkins gave you the filth, the ugliness, the baleful suffocating odours of this slum den from which came forth day by day the staff of life for the slum-savages. She plunged you plump into the lowest depths of human misery and degradation. From the bakehouse came the hot breath of hell itself; and the baker, with the red light of hell behind him, came raging, stick in hand, to appease the devil's lust of cruelty that was consuming him.

Crouched down in a corner of a bare little room, into which the light of heaven was only admitted by a glassless window just below the broken ceiling, you were made to listen to the man's footsteps coming up the broken stairs, to feel the doglike agony of fear. Then, though it froze you with horror, drove the blood from your heart and sent it drumming and beating in your brain, you were forced to watch the white-faced man at his devil's work, to hear the whimpering inarticulate prayers for mercy changed to the long-drawn horror of screaming martyrdom.

Gasping, panting, she lies now face-downwards on the floor, like a half-killed dog, spasmodically writhing. The man has gone, locking the door behind him, and hour after hour she sobs and writhes, till the black night slowly falls and hides all the secret undiscovered crime of the abominable labyrinth.

But in the darkened room there is a strange perfume of flowers: a sweetly penetrating scent of the white Japanese lilies; and presently raising her aching head, she understands that it is no doglike delusion. There are the lilies. A tall man dressed in white has come in through the locked door. For a moment she thought it was the baker in his night-gown, and that he had put his oil lamp upon the floor behind him. But he is not the baker, and the light is not from a kerosene flame. In his right hand he carries the branch of lilies, and very gently he swings the white blossoming rod about her back and thighs, and from the hot red stripes the throb and the pain is taken. Then, as he kneels beside her, she sees his feet, and he shows her his injured hands with the great holes from which the blood is dripping; and her poor little heart overflows with pity for one more unfortunate than herself.

Certainly, cruel as the baker has done her down again and again, he has never served her as bad as that. He has let her have it with stick, cane, and strap, with fist and with boot, but he has not come to driving nails through her feet and her hands. Poor man!

Then the man, stooping over her, kisses both her swollen eyelids and she sleeps.

Down in the dirty street below the window, a costermonger's boy, packing his patron's barrow, and casting the faded unsold stock into the gutter, has heard the small sobbing voice above his head and has been throwing some of the wasted flowers at the narrow window-opening. It is a girl's voice; girls love flowers; and he would gladly cheer the poor little devil with a message of sympathy if he could. Only one missile, a branch of ruined lilies, reaches its mark and sails in through the window.

And there it is in the morning when she wakes—with a stain of blood or of crimson rust upon the pale green stalk.

That was how Miss Hopkins set about her—miracles, anything you like—trying to take your breath away. Crash of the noisy chords: 'Oh do please attend. I do want you to listen.' A long, strong, noble book, Vivien soon saw, turning the closely-printed pages, skimming forward, reading here and there: no trimmings, or ornament, no trumpery mock-tragedy, none of the floating surface-scum of stale twaddle, nothing about the joy of struggling into fashionable society, or the anguish of being driven therefrom—where life flows deepest, there the story flowed. Apparently, no further hints of sacred mysteries. Not in the least a religious novel, though it seemed perhaps to contain the assumption as of a proved fact that

beyond our stream there lies the wider ocean. Held by two or three passages that she had only meant to skim, Vivien thought that, in this hasty sampling before she could quiet down to a methodic attack, she had grasped the gist of Miss Hopkins's teaching. Hope was walking in the darkness: nothing that lived should cease to follow Hope's beckoning finger. And this—if one turned it into common words—seemed the voice of Miss Hopkins speaking her message from the littered bookstall and the crowded shelves: Now, complain if you dare. I am showing you real misery: not the torment of crumpled rose leaves. While this is being suffered, go on complaining of your badly-made bed if you dare.

It was a message that spoke as directly to people at Pring's as to people in Grosvenor Square. Next day she went on with the book in the proper order of its well-thumbed pages, and all the while she felt the consoling strength of it rising from between the dingy brown boards of the library binding. Perhaps, comparatively speaking, crumpled rose leaves were the only thing of which those who lay at Pring's could complain. It was cowardly to pity oneself: it was wicked to forget that Hope was beckoning. It was basely craven to think of lying down in the darkness by the grotto's wall.

Then, at last, she made her wonderful discovery.

As she took up the book once more, she looked at the title-page. '*Where Life flows Deep*, by the author of *Dropping the Scales*. Twentieth edition.' There were no chapter headings, and therefore there was no contents-table; but after the title-page—just where not one reader in a hundred perhaps would ever notice it—there was a dedication:

'On the chance that it may some day come into her hands, and as a token of affectionate regard, I dedicate this fable to Vi Shelton, my first and kindest literary critic. Maud Hopkins, 1898.'

Maud Hopkins! The baker's daughter! The little scribbling girl at Mrs. Maitland's! Oh, what a lamb! In a moment, memory brought her into view—sedate, demure, with swift unfaltering hand, scribbling, scribbling: covering backs of envelopes, any scrap of paper, making the wet words fly. And at Maitey's we thought our spinning spider was a queer little prig, and all that we could give her—in spite of Bauermann's advice to cultivate her friendship—was a condescending smile. Well might she seem odd and quaint, shyly self-contained and yet priggishly confident—she was a genius. Now, from afar, in the plenitude of her glory, she has flashed upon us this dazzling ray of kindness.

Vivien wrote a long letter to dearest Maud, and sent it to the publishers to be forwarded. It seemed an impertinence to call the world-famous author *her* dearest Maud—but what else could she call her?—and she was conscious of her dire incompetence adequately to express her feelings: the old school-girl phrases leapt from her pen and mocked her when she strove to dress her thoughts in their best clothes. Nothing was hers of Maud's divine power of making short everyday words come out and do the work of all the many-syllabled dictionary giants. But Maud, who could see through brick walls and into human hearts, would understand and pardon. It was an honour to find one's name carved upon a monument that ought to last for ever; Maud was simply a lamb to have remembered her wretched existence; as to Maud's speaking of criticism—oh that was sheer bosh and made her blush to think of, if indeed she had ever ventured to give an opinion on anything Maud had written. To her dying day, Vivien would never forget this great honour, would never cease to take prideful pleasure in the thought of it, would, she hoped, ever continue to derive strength and consolation from the noble book itself.

Saturday had come again when she received a reply from Miss Hopkins. The letter arrived just before Vivien was going to pay the dog-bill at the mews. She carried the letter upstairs to her bedroom to read it in quiet, away from her shop-companions.

'My dearest Vi,'—that was what the author of *Where Life flows Deep* called her—'I cannot tell you what happiness your letter has given me. In every word of it I can read that the years have not changed you: that you are kind and sweet as of old. I am overjoyed by hearing that you like my book.

'You see that I write to you from our old Southbourne. I have come back to Southbourne because I have something to do, and they tell me Southbourne is a good place in which to do it. I will tell you what it is that I have to do—at the end of my letter.'

Then Miss Hopkins talked about the past, telling Vivien that she was not at the time very happy at the school. The girls were not really kind to her; and, although she could not show it perhaps, she had an intense longing for the sympathy and love of her school-mates. Vi alone had been consistently kind; had deserved all Maud's love and gratitude; and had been given both. 'I don't think you ever guessed how much your kindness meant for me who was truly alone in the midst of a crowd, and somehow I could not tell you. I could have written my thought, but I could not speak it. Afterwards I wanted to write

to you, but I did not know where you were. Of all the girls at Mrs. Maitland's, not one asked for my address when I left, not one ever wished to hear of me again. Thus, I lost all touch with our old world and there was no one to give me news of you.'

She begged that Vivien would send another letter, and say if she was happy, well; and, if possible, recount all her history since they parted.

'And now,' said Miss Hopkins, 'I must tell you what it is that I have to do at Southbourne. I have come back—to die. It is not to be soon they tell me; but already I am so weak that I can only work an hour on my good days; and on my bad days not at all. I write this from my couch in the verandah of a kind doctor's house, and this letter will be all my work to-day. I do feel regret—because of my work. I have done so little and I might have done so much, if only I had known. I purposely delayed: waiting, toiling at my craft, thinking that what I had to say might never be heard unless it was said in the best possible manner. Now, I wish I had scribbled away as I used to at school, as fast, as fast as I could. It is all written in my brain, and now it can never be written anywhere else. That is all my regret.'

Vivien, having reverently bestowed this letter in her big box, was a long time on her knees searching for the five shillings that was wanted for the dog's bill. This morning she had folded the money in a piece of paper and left it lying in readiness at the top of the box. She had replaced the bed-spread, but had carelessly left the box unlocked. The key was in the lock as she had foolishly left it. In the course of the day some one had been to the box and stolen the money. A cruel disaster!

In fear, she dived lower down, seeking her principal hoard—the remainder of her monthly earnings. Had the thief taken her all? No. That was safe—untouched. She had received exactly twenty-seven shillings and fourpence last pay day: salary, twenty-five shillings; premiums or spiffs, two shillings and fourpence. Counting the coins, she found that the balance was all here. A quarter of a pound was the full amount of her loss—a heavy enough blow, but not utter and irretrievable ruin. It meant that, deducting Imp's expenses, her private income for the month would be reduced to two shillings and fourpence. And that again meant that she would be driven into debt—would fall into arrears with the laundress.

To Miss Moulton, who found her on her knees in front of the rifled repository, she dolefully related what had happened.

'Well, upon my word,' cried Miss Moulton, who was honestly distressed and really sympathetic, 'it is a dirty shame, Princess. There's a dirty mean thief in this house for sure.'

Miss Moulton's face blazed with indignation, and for a moment the hateful thought came to Vivien that Miss Moulton was too exuberant in her sympathy. But poor Miss Moulton by challenging the suspicious thought killed it.

'It *is* a dirty shame—making one believe all the world is thieves. I hope you don't suspect me—though I shouldn't blame you if you did. But God strike me dead here and now if I am a thief. Look here. Only Friday week it was two bob lifted out of Miss Culley's jacket as it hung in the passage while she had her supper. Last Wednesday it was one and three pinched off Miss Watson because she left her purse on the dressing-table for the three minutes she was out of the room you know where—and we've all missed our coppers continual. But five bob straight off! That beats the lot,' and Miss Moulton gave Vivien a friendly squeeze of the hand. 'Poor Princess! I am truly sorry for you, and I don't wonder it made you cry when you found it out.'

But, sad as was this loss of the five shillings, it was really the sad letter from Maud Hopkins that had made her cry.

XXXVI

OF course for her there could be no summer holiday. You had to work for a year at Pring's before you earned the right to a fortnight's rest without loss of salary. But in the middle of blazing August fate smiled upon her by sending Miss Culley and Miss Moulton away for their fortnight on the same day; and for two luxurious weeks she had a whole bed to herself, and was able to sleep so much better than of late that Miss Ellenberger moaning and muttering in the vacated territory never once woke her.

The shop had slowly done its evil work with her health. The bad food, the bad air, the strain of standing through the hot slow days had slowly sapped the store of physical strength built up at Hawkridge. Headaches, backaches, leg-aches, lassitude, and degeneration of nerves, muscles, and tissues—these were the routine gifts of the shop to all its young ladies. For each in turn the demon Indigestion made its greasy sloping path, down which the sickened victim should reel and slide, till she fell into the white-walled cavern wherein sat the pallid vampire Anæmia waiting for its ghastly meal.

Vivien, whose constitution offered an unusually stout resistance to the damaging conditions of shop-life, had already become slightly anæmic; and, with a cracking shop-headache each evening by the hour of tidying-up, recurrent faintness and breathlessness in the morning, a shop-weariness at all hours, she was an easy prey to the idiopathic attacks of mental depression.

She had bought Miss Hopkins's book in the sixpenny edition, but alas, its strengthening power had gone—had in fact been destroyed in a week; and only the consoling kindness of the flattering dedication was left for her to fall back upon. Miss Hopkins's letter had wiped out the message of Miss Hopkins's book. In the doom of the author was published the old hideous message—the hopeless cruelty of life. It was no good for Miss Hopkins to write more letters to encourage, to cheer, to hearten, when, as one knew, the letters were written from a death-bed. Each pencilled word was a symbol of despair.

Sign himself took no regular holiday, but he spent all his week-ends at his favourite seaside resort, and one had not now to assist at the completion of his Sunday toilet. Concerning one of the week-end trips the shop was morbidly interested. Behind the counters there ran a whisper that shy Miss Millar was about to go to Southend from Saturday to Monday. In the well-known progress of our Sultan's amours the Southend visit was traditional. Southend marked the culmination—the zenith reached and thereafter a downward curve. So said the whisper. You knew what his beginnings were. Well, this, one might say, was his endings.

Was the thing true, or only an unhealthy imagining bred of the foul shop air, the gaseous fumes and the floating dirt that rose and choked one? Who could tell?

From the Dough-nut herself, you learnt nothing. Nothing could be got out of shy Miss Millar by rotting her. All admitted that. From the very earliest stage of the business, she had fenced herself against the feverishly curious shop behind an impenetrable reserve. She baffled one by demure replies, an oddly timid equanimity that rotting could not remove.

'I saw you and Sign in a hansom the other evening, but you were so proud you wouldn't notice me. It was cuts to foot-people.'

'You saw *me* in a hansom?'

'Oh yes, unless me eyes deceived me.'

'But I am afraid they did deceive you, Miss Stothard. I don't recall riding in a hansom cab for a long time—not since the funeral of an aunt of mine. That was before you and I met, Miss Stothard,' and Miss Millar would modestly add up a column of her check-sheet in a completely unruffled manner.

Now, the whisper said that she was making her Southend trousseau. A small new valise had arrived; a fresh blouse had been seen upstairs; two parcels came last night; Miss Millar was occupied to a late hour with her needle. Was it true? Yes—if you read Miss Russell's face as the shop read it. If you believed what the shop believed, you saw drawn features, hectic flush, restless eyes, unconscious muscular contractions —you saw Miss Russell going fussily about her work and suffering the torments of the damned.

'I do hope, Dough-nut, you'll have this fine weather by the sea. I do think a wet Sunday at the seaside is such an ojous sell.'

Miss Millar was too busy to answer.

'I quite agree with you, Miss Watson,' said another girl.

'But there's no signs of a break-up. I think you can count on a fine Sunday, Miss Millar. The sea ought to be warm enough for you to paddle if you want to.'

Then Miss Millar looked up.

'I too agree with Miss Watson. But I am not going to the sea on Sunday. I am going to friends—in Surrey. If I want to paddle, I shall have to find one of the pretty little brooks—or do it in my wash-'and basin—if it should be wet—after all.'

On that Saturday Sign went off, carrying his bag, all by himself, rather earlier than usual.

Miss Watson had begged some uncooked rice from Mrs. Schofield; and Miss Culley had somehow procured an old white satin shoe. As Miss Millar, with her smart little valise in hand, went down the dingy staircase, they threw the shoe after her and pelted her with the rice. She was wearing a new hat with the new blouse, and it was thought that the serge jacket that hung over her arm was also new. When she came out of her room in this going-away costume, she paused on the dark landing and looked round shyly, as though knowing that she would have to run the gauntlet. She made no protests, but quietly let herself out into the street, and, bag in hand, walked away without even troubling to take the rice out of her hair.

On Monday a desultory rotting fire was maintained—but without the least perceptible result.

'Dough-nut! Was there many people by the seashore yesterday?'

'I was not by the seashore yesterday.'

'Miss Moulton, have you heard what Miss Culley says? That by Act of Parliament no band is allowed to play at the seaside on Sunday—not even sacred music? That's all a tale, isn't it, Miss Millar?'

'I really don't know.'

'Didn't you hear the band on the pier yesterday?'

'I was too far off to hear it—forty miles, or more, I dare say.'

Miss Russell was not present when any of these leading questions were asked and answered. She was ill upstairs—a nervous break-down that lasted two days. On the third morning she came down again—a gaunt, hollow-eyed spectre.

September was unbearably hot. It seemed that it would never rain again, as though storm and wind would never resume

their sway, as though autumn was but a meaningless almanac-term, and that the oppressive burden of torrid summer must be carried on into eternity. The nights now were worse than the days: showing an absurdly small drop in temperature between sunset and dawn, getting themselves talked about and written about, by dilettante amateur meteorologists who wanted to learn their cause, and by hard-working London doctors who wished that they did not know their effect.

Vivien, with an evening headache that sometimes waited now until a morning headache came on duty, had lost all belief in that beckoning figure which Miss Hopkins said was walking in the darkness. It was not beckoning her. What could she hope for? Spiffs? After the rate of one and a quarter per cent. her premiums for a really good week—when luck had favoured her and she had not done too much city-trotting—amounted to one shilling. Frantic beckoning could not make her rationally hope for more than an extra four shillings to be added to the monthly twenty-five on pay day. Twenty-nine shillings—supposing that record spiffs were earned and garnered without deduction of a single fine: nine shillings for the month over and above the pound required for the bare board and lodging of her small dependent! No margin here for amassing capital, for rolling up the little hoard that should enable her to meet unexpected calls—a veterinary surgeon's bill, the cost of a new leather collar, or another and safer lead. Fourpence-halfpenny for *Where Life flows Deep* had been an extravagance.

She had hoped four months ago. When first entering Pring's she had hoped greatly. She had intended to perform miracles after shop hours. She would make up for squandered time, study, learn the useful arts that lead to independence: so that when she had to speak of herself in an advertisement she would at last have something to say. Like Marian, she would work too at night for the purpose of earning immediate money: write envelopes for circulars, copy legal documents, perhaps even write stories for a children's newspaper. She had intended very jealously to guard all this money that she earned at nights. It would be little enough she knew, but from it would come in time this great comfort—a sense of security. With the growing fund in hand, she could face the chances of fortune's wheel without the old tremors. A slave by day, she would each night be bringing herself nearer to freedom. And by day and by night she would be plotting, planning, devising the possible means of a swift escape—the discovery of an opening as companion, etc., the capture of one of the dwellers in that inner circle of the

labour market, who wanted an untutored secretary, an unpractised sick-nurse, a nursery governess without a single certificate or diploma—and who did not mind a dog.

But the crushing shop-work dissipated all that sort of nonsense. A week, three days of Pring's, taught her the impossibility of the evening programme. There was no shop rule against working after hours on your own account. There were tyrannous rules of every conceivable character; but not that rule. It was not necessary. You could not thoughtfully observe your bedroom companions tumbling into their fitful sleep with an unfinished sentence on their yawning lips, without understanding that the shop gave most people as much work as they could hope to do with success.

She lived in the past now. School-days—Mrs. Wardrop's—the happy past when life was lit with foolish fancies. She loved to conjure up the days before she had ever heard of Lady Colwyn. Walking slowly through the hot streets on these September evenings, she used to summon the kind faces and the pleasant voices, one after another, to keep her company. That dear old colonel! He came to her call as she glanced at the newsboys' bills on the boards outside the newspaper shops. Out there in his Eastern home, was he turning his steadfast eyes south-west, and sharpening his notched sabre, and wondering when his mistress would want him?

South Africa always on board and on bill. 'Mr. Chamberlain's speech'; 'Peace or War'; 'Queen holds Council';—and so on.

One night at the library, after reading these posters, still thinking of that kind colonel of chance, she stood for the first time at one of the wooden screens that held the daily news. She skimmed through a leading article in an evening paper, and at last learned all that it was really necessary to know about this boring question of South Africa.

There would be no war. Many people no doubt thought with Mr. Pring that a good lesson ought to be given to our troublesome neighbours. But the Queen desires peace. That, according to the evening paper, had very properly decided wise and loyal councillors who for a day or two had been wavering. It should and must now be the wish of all that the long, long reign might close in peace.

Vivien loyally concurred in the wise decision of the Ministry, and all the way home, with a curious reverential emotion, she thought of her as she had shown herself that day at Windsor—driving in the calm evening hour, with the sun setting behind her in a glorious unclouded sky: the white dust flying from her

horses' feet and looking like puffs of white smoke from unseen cannon.

October came with sudden change at last: chillness, drizzling rain, and fogs. Yesterday, servant-girls enjoying their afternoon-out were prowling these northern streets in the piqué dresses, white open-work stockings, and buckled shoes that form the summer full-dress of their class. To-day, one of Mr. Pring's most prosperous customers was shivering beneath her sham furs, and complaining that the place was not heated with hot-water pipes.

The change in the weather tried the shop severely. The low barometer found out the weak spot on the calf of Miss Moulton's leg; beneath the lessened atmospheric pressure the enlarged veins did just what they liked with her: twice in a morning she was compelled to ask Sign's permission to leave the shop and limp upstairs to allay the fierce throbbing with a dab of her latest purchase. The rain seemed inimical to all the weary feet, and corns stirred into activity by a sharp tap of a neighbour's heel drew forth stifled squeaks of pain. Behind both counters young ladies sniffed while serving, or dived to use handkerchiefs, or turned abruptly to sneeze into open boxes on the shelves. All day long consumptive Miss Gregory was shaking the cash-desk with her unceasing cough.

'That girl,' said Mr. Pring, 'reminds me of a dog in a kennel —bark, bark, bark. If I wasn't a kind-hearted man, I 'd tell her to go and bark outside my shop and not come back again. I shall have to do it sooner or later.'

'She is very ill,' said Miss Russell mildly.

'Well, how the devil can I 'elp that? It's not my fault, is it?'

'Oh no—But I was thinking she 's bound to give up—herself —before long.'

'I 'd give a fi-pou-note to be rid of her.'

'Will you? Then—if you will—I 'll arrange for her to go to the—'

'No I won't,' said Mr. Pring. 'But I 'll sign any papers for her—you know, recommendations, testimonials, whatever they call 'em—for the hospital. And, look here, I 'll pay her salary for a couple of weeks—well, for three weeks, if you can arrange it—and I 'll have a youth in the desk and let him live in. He can sleep in the workroom. I 'll reorganise a good many things in this shop before the spring season. I 'll . . .'

All this was at the end of first dining-party, and Vivien, going upstairs, heard no more.

In the desk the doomed girl was munching an oatmeal biscuit and choking herself with the crumbs.

'Yes, thank you, Miss Shelton,' she whispered. 'I am feeling much better. I don't go by my cough. That's only the weather. I feel better in myself . . . Miss Shelton—thank you again for that box of lozengers you gave me. They done me a lot a' good. They done my father good too. He was blowing his nose continual, and he said when he ate the lozengers that they must be made of magic.'

During this cold and foggy week, the old evening headache spread itself out through the twenty-four hours and remained with Vivien incessantly. More than ever she shunned the gossiping tongues of her companions, the shrill laughs that pierced one's ears. They were kind after their manner, with sharp inquisitive questions, and eager advice to go out straight to the chemist's and buy somebody's famous nerve-tonic. 'You can't get round what they say on the bottle: It will be cheaper in the long-run than a doctor's bill.' That was a dreadful threat. A sudden call in the form of fees for medical treatment for herself, and not medical treatment for her dog! They were sympathetic in their own way, but they thought any one with a headache—unless it was an obviously declared bilious headache—required 'cheering up' more than anything else. It would be a cruel act to keep any one out of a good joke because she had gone to bed early, or allow a headache to deprive any one of learning what had been happening downstairs.

At this time it had become apparent to the shop that all was over between Sign and Miss Millar. The Dough-nut's reign was at an end. The Dough-nut, like Miss Russell, had gone on the shelf as a back number. The guv'nor had spoken to her with brusqueness during shop hours. And after shop hours, some one had seen something that removed any further doubt. From the passage, at night, some one had looked through the darkened shop into the gas-lit room beyond. Sign pacing the room with his hands in his pockets; Miss Millar on the old red-covered sofa that stands beneath the window between the stacked walls of green boxes, with head on arm against sofa-back, crying as though her heart would break! The guv'nor has been giving her a good dressing-down about something. 'And now,' says Sign, 'stop it. That's enough of it. . . . D'you hear what I said? I've said my say. You understand. Now go about your business.'

Miss Millar, with bowed head and handkerchief to eyes, silently creeps upstairs after the retreating eavesdropper.

The shop no longer doubted. Girls behind both counters,

as they met their master's roving eye, fumbled with string and paper; or, faintly flushing, readjusted box-lids that had not been neatly closed. It was a thought to make one tremble. The Sultan was looking about him.

'Princess,' said Miss Culley one night when she had come up earlier than the other two occupants of the bedroom, and had been cheering up Vivien with friendly chatter. 'I believe, Princess, you 'll be the next.'

Vivien shuddered. Here was the echo in spoken words of the soul-sickening thought that had already formed itself in her own mind.

'Sooner you than me, Princess!'

Pring's Haberdashery Department was situated in the room behind the shop—in the cupboard, in the corner. It was an old mahogany chiffonier that filled the space between the front wall and Mr. Pring's bureau. Mr. Pring himself had designed the clever conversion of this piece of furniture from domestic to commercial uses. The shelves that in some honest family once held glass dishes of marmalade, currant cake, tea-caddy and tea-cosy, had been extirpated; and in their place was fitted a compact nest of drawers, fashioned and arranged after Mr. Pring's own plan.

Each drawer was numbered, and glued to the inside of the right-hand cupboard door there was a large piece of cardboard, whereon was written large in alphabetical order a complete list of the small-wares stocked, with the corresponding drawer numbers.

You came to the Haberdashery Department to supply the worrying needs of customers, the fiddling little things that customers will have served to them along with their fancy drapery or take their custom elsewhere: reels of cotton, tapes, threads, sewing silks, thimbles, pins, needles, hooks and eyes, the very cheapest sort of buttons, not worthy to be placed on cards, but like seeds kept loose—things whose cost was measured by farthings, infinitesimal light wares to which no profit could hang. This old-fashioned haberdashery was vexation and annoyance to Pring; but, like 'matching,' it was a stern necessity of his trade. If, when a lady had bought a skirt length from your latest extra line, you declined to furnish her with the tackle to make it up, she would quickly say you had grown too big for your boots. Serving your lady, you hastened to the chiffonier, ransacked the drawers, snatched what you wanted, and hastened back to her. And woe betide you if, when the lady had gone, you forgot all about the chiffonier and failed to return to make everything neat and natty.

When Pring found the department with its front doors open, the drawers with jumbled contents gaping wide, and tape dangling, he was terrible.

'Who done this? That's all I want to know,' and he would stand with flaming cheeks upon the threshold of the room. 'Who was it last served small-wares? Now who was it? . . . Oh! Miss Watson! Step 'ere if you please.'

Then, you could hear him, hidden in the corner behind the wall, dressing-down Miss Watson.

''Ave the kindness to look at that. Look at it for yourself—that's all I ask. Looks neat and natty, don't it? That's a nice sluttish dam dirty trick to play, isn't it? 'Ave the kindness to put that straight, and oblige me, if you don't mind—if it takes you till bedtime to do it.'

And he would come swaggering out of the room with his hands in his pockets, and would scornfully quote the ancient, time-worn maxim of the trade:

'Stock well kept is stock 'arf sold. We all know that, don't we? and much we care, if it isn't us as has to buy the stock and pay for it.'

On the top of the chiffonier were piled to the ceiling large and small boxes, in which were stored the balls of twine, the brown and the white papers, and all the other 'counter-accessories,' as they were called. You had to be careful, when busy below, not to bring down a box of accessories upon the bridge of your nose. Here, to the boxes you came, after asking leave, to re-stock yourself when you had run out of an accessory. Here, in the corner, you stood upon a chair hunting through the boxes if, as often happened, empty boxes had not been duly raised to the top of the pile and the full boxes been permitted to subside in their turn.

And here, in the corner, one dismal October afternoon, Sign *pawed.*

She had made the department tidy and had opened one of the lower boxes when Sign came in and sat down in front of his bureau.

'Well, what is it?'

'I wanted some string, sir. I asked leave this morning.'

''Elp yourself,' said Sign affably, and he began to chew his toothpick. 'Can't find it, eh?' and he laid down his toothpick.

'Want me to 'elp you? 'Ave my chair. Best stand on the chair,' and he rose and pushed his chair into the corner.

'Want some string, eh? Just a little bit of string, eh? Why don't you jump up? Eh? Eh?'

He had taken her by the arm above the elbow and, as he spoke in a low voice, he slid his hand up and down.

'Let me go,' she whispered.

''Elp you on to the chair—Get the string, eh?' and he held her firmly.

'Let me go,' she whispered again, and with a wrench she shook off the clinging hand. 'How dare you—how dare you—how dare you touch me?'

She was almost breathless. He stood before her blocking the way back to the shop. He was red and angry, and he whispered huskily.

'Oh what a proud princess! Aren't you a proud princess, eh?' He had never before shown that he knew her nickname, but of course Miss Millar would have told him everything about all of them. 'Princess Touch-me-not, eh? Oh all right,' and he nodded ominously. 'All right'—with another nod—'all right'; and he pulled away his chair. 'Now go about your business.'

Presently, toothpick in mouth, he came out into the shop and banged down a ball of twine upon the counter in front of her.

'Miss Shelton, string.'

He had been rebuffed in his beginnings.

XXXVII

THE strange man in the shop set everybody wondering. He called early in the morning and talked with Mr. Pring in the back room. Then he came again, and sat in the shop, and sat with Mr. Pring at the bureau; and then, when he went out once more, Mr. Pring explained the presence of the strange man. He was a traveller from Shadbolts and Nelson's, sent to Mr. Pring with very important business proposals—proposals so important that they compelled Mr. Pring to put on his 'considering-cap.' The explanation was given to Miss Russell, but all heard it. Yet still the girls wondered. It was the first time that any one had seen Sign decently civil to a new traveller. He was jovial enough with the regularly accredited envoys from the houses which habitually he patronised. But with strangers of the road he was invariably stand-offish. His method with one of these visitors was to take out a penknife and pare his nails and whistle, until the talkative guest withdrew.

By dinner-time, however, the girls ceased to wonder. They thought they had got at the true explanation. This man was the first foreboding evidence of the coming revolution. The much-discussed change of front was about to be effected. Sign, they thought, had finally determined to go into the Manchester; and this was an expert, summoned for advice and assistance in carrying out the complete alteration of trade scheme. The stranger was one who had the working of 'the heavy' at the tips of his fingers, one who could after a careful look-round tell Sign what was possible and what belonged to the realm of Chimera. In truth it was he, and not Sign, who to-day was wearing the considering-cap.

After second dining-party, for which Sign waited and at which the stranger was hospitably entertained, most people were quite sure what was up. They watched the man intently as, seizing his opportunity when custom was slack, he ran a tape-measure down the whole length of either counter. Then he measured the height of a door and the depth of a shelf; and then, after retiring to the back room and making notes in a bulging pocket-book, he came out, took a chair near Miss Gregory's desk, looked

at the clock, and, plainly, began to register the number of customers to the half hour. One of the girls—Miss Watson—declared that she had seen men at these tricks before: sizing up everything for a day and then being able to make a report. Trade surveyors—or some name like that—you called them. 'Mark my words, we shall be in the heavy before a month is over our heads.'

They might well betray interest as the shadow of the approaching revolution fell thus upon the shop floor: for the upheaval of the old arrangements might be a serious matter for some of them. The new order of things would mean this. Mr. Pring would divide his shop into the two main departments: one window and one counter would remain as at present for the fancy; the other window and the other counter would be devoted to the Manchester. But woollens, calicos, linens, blanketings, sheetings, etc., are not trifles that girls can handle with success. You do see young ladies in the heavy, but not often. The odds were a thousand to one that Mr. Pring, doing the thing in style, would introduce gentlemen at his new counter. Five young gentlemen would come in for the heavy, and five young ladies would go out from the light to make room for them. Five out of ten to go—two to one against each young lady's chance of retaining her position. Worse odds really! Miss Russell of course would be kept on; and Miss Stothard, who took second sales, would almost certainly be also kept on. Three places left for eight young ladies to struggle for. Nearly three to one against you.

It was really time for every one to put on the considering-cap. Autumn engagements must nearly all be made by now. However sure of yourself you might feel, it was not an auspicious hour for stepping outside into the labour market. If, said Miss Culley, this thing was coming, it would be wiser to walk straight out now than wait. Every week would make it harder to find another situation. Conditions outside would get worse and worse till the good time arrived again next March and employers began to engage for the spring season.

Pleasant enough on the other hand, said Miss Culley, for the fortunate three who, staunchly waiting for whatever happened, withstood the shock of the Manchester invasion and found themselves safe in their trench behind the counter breastwork when the battle was over. A remodelled Pring society for the lucky three, masculine smiles and secret signals flashing behind Sign's back all day long, male escort down the dark stairs to dinner, risky stories at tea to be heard in a baritone instead of a soprano whisper. An attractive prospect—'For you may be sure of this: with five gentlemen to keep him in order, old Sign would have

to learn to be'ave himself. And they wouldn't put up with being spoken to same as he does us girls.'

But Miss Culley, arguing thus excellently well, had started her logical train from false premises. She and the others were altogether off the line in their conjectures. From Miss Stothard's lips Vivien, going down to first tea-party, learned the truth.

Sign had been throwing dust in people's eyes. The man upstairs was truly an expert, but his expertness was quite other than that attributed to him by the watching shop.

He was—a *detective*. And he was here to catch the house-thief.

Although Vivien had not herself suffered again, the small peculations had, as she knew, continued. Miss Culley and Miss Watson had again been punished. Miss Gregory at the desk had been sevenpence out on a day's total, and had naturally suspected that the thief had been at work with her. Mrs. Schofield had missed three halfpence, and of course was full of suspicion. The thing was insupportable. It was as though there was an invisible magpie in their midst. You never felt yourself safe from the danger of loss of money, and the greater danger of loss of reputation: because every one was beginning to suspect every one else. Nevertheless, this minor misery of life might have gone on for ever, said Miss Stothard, but for the fact that three days ago Sign had missed half a sovereign. 'That was the climax.'

Miss Russell knew all about the man and she had told Miss Stothard as one above suspicion, making Miss Stothard first give her word of honour not to divulge the secret. But now Miss Stothard, stopping Vivien half-way down the gloomy stairs, declared that something had occurred to unseal her mouth. Subsequently to the revelation, she had rediscovered the secret for herself. That, without dishonour, freed her tongue, and she must now use it in telling Vivien or bite the tip off in suppressed excitement.

After second dining-party, when the others left, Sign and the man had remained at the table. Miss Stothard, last to leave, returning to look for her handkerchief—which as the event proved was all the time really in her pocket,—and softly hunting outside the half-open door, happened to hear 'all that passed.'

'Princess, I never knew such a man—He fairly made my flesh creep. He knows who it is already—Can you guess? . . . *Miss Ellenberger!* He told Sign he was as sure as a weasel. And that's just what he looks like—seemed to me after I 'd heard it.'

Now this was the plan, as Miss Stothard caught it. Marked

money to be lying handy in Sign's room, in reach of all who went in there. The trap to be all ready when second tea-bell sounded. Second tea-bell to be signal that '*two upon ten*' was beginning. They would take care that Miss Ellenberger went into the room and had undisturbed access to the trap. Then—if a coin was missed—this would happen last thing: no one allowed to leave her place at the counter, short speech by Sign asking all to permit of search of pockets. The man at Miss Ellenberger's elbow. And, with Miss Russell and Mrs. Schofield there for propriety's sake, Sign and the man intended 'to go through' Miss Ellenberger if they had to strip her to the skin in the operation.

Thus Miss Stothard on the dark stairs, in an awestruck whisper, but altogether pitiless in her mental attitude towards the culprit.

'And a mean low thief—she deserves all she gets, I say.'

Vivien, upstairs again after tea, looked across the shop and saw her bedfellow busy behind the opposite counter—cutting off a longish piece of book-muslin, folding it, packing it in white paper, making out the bill, handing her book to Sign, going to the desk, and with a heavy smile giving parcel and duplicate to the customer—all unconscious of that dreadful *mot d'ordre* 'two upon ten,' without instinctive chilling of blood or hastened pulse to warn her of the dire peril that was approaching.

Then the second tea-bell rang.

Among second tea-party Miss Ellenberger went down. For fifteen or twenty minutes Miss Ellenberger would be out of danger. Miss Stothard, in passing to the cash-desk, winked.

Vivien's temples were throbbing, with something worse than the shop-headache; her throat was hot and dry; her fingers became cold—from the depths below the mean shop-surface the dark figure was slowly rising and spreading the veils. Miss Watson had been into the room to fetch things from the haberdashery department. Miss Millar went in.

Perhaps one of the other girls was really the guilty one? Perhaps all, including Miss Ellenberger, were innocent?

No. Miss Ellenberger was the thief. Miss Ellenberger had asked Sign's permission to leave the shop that day on which five shillings had disappeared from the trunk upstairs. She remembered now with absolute certainty. And, deeper than the plane of any circumstantial evidence, the intuitive conviction that this and none other was the guilty wretch had rapidly assumed controlling force over all thought and argument. Her bedfellow was the thief. Yet not from a conscience burdened by the weight of stolen coins had come those midnight moanings

and groanings. Beneath the heavy sleep-mask there lay hidden a darker memory than pilfered pence. Past fear, not dread of the future, had wrenched from the sleeping voice those articulate cries of tragic import.

Ten minutes since the bell sounded. Miss Moulton had been in. Then, serving a customer, Vivien went in.

The trap had been well laid. Close by your hand, as you stood before the chiffonier in the corner concealed from all the shop's eyes, a drawer in the bureau, just above Sign's blotting pad, carelessly pulled out and forgotten! Sign's own bunch of keys hanging in the drawer lock; inside the drawer, the money lying loose upon some papers—a dozen or twenty coins: shillings, sixpences, three-penny bits, some pennies, one half-sovereign. All waiting for the mouse that could not resist the fatal cheese.

Sign, mid-way down the shop, had his eyes upon the door as she came out with the reel of cotton for her customer. He turned his back at once, and was making a fuss about the band-labels on some Ecru Edgings when Vivien called him to verify the bill. The man had gone down to the shop-front and was examining his note-book just inside the doorway. Vivien's fingers trembled as she rolled up the tiny packet in whisp-form, twisting the ends to hold all firm. As she stood by the cash desk, bill-book in hand, the dusky form had risen and was towering above her. The horror of life shook her, and she stammered in speaking to Miss Gregory.

The mouse must be warned.

Turning with her change, she saw second tea-party coming back. Miss Ellenberger had crossed the shop and was already taking up her position between Miss Stothard and Miss Millar. Sign, strolling up the shop, brought out his toothpick on the threshold of the back room; took a furtive glance at the trap; came down the shop again; and, at Miss Ellenberger's counter, began to talk about the Paris Ecrus once more. The man was looking out into the street.

How could the mouse be warned?

Suddenly Vivien, still carrying her bill-book, left her place at the end of her counter and went over to the cash-desk.

'Did I drop my handkerchief?' she whispered, borrowing a hint from Miss Stothard.

'Don't see it,' Miss Gregory whispered, leaning forward through her little window.

'All right, don't trouble.'

Then swiftly she entered the back room, opened her book, wrote a few words in a large strong hand, tore out the sheet and

laid it in the open drawer. Her pencil snapped with a sharp report as she wrote the last word, and the noise made her start in fear. It seemed that all the world must hear it. Without looking to the right or left, she came back to her place and stooped over the counter to hide her tell-tale face.

'Miss Ellenberger, forward.'

Then Vivien raised her head. None of those 'in the know' were looking at her; none of them had been observing her. If any one else had been watching her movements, she would only have thought that Miss Shelton had gone back to the cupboard to tidy up. The fear had been lest Sign should notice her and go in to examine his trap at close range again.

'Miss Ellenberger,' said Sign, 'serve this young gentleman if you please. Miss Stothard is occupied with *me*.'

A lad of fourteen or fifteen had entered the shop, and Sign, for a moment discontinuing his discourse about the Ecru Edgings, had found out what the lad wanted. The lad wanted some tape for his 'muvver.'

Miss Ellenberger, coming forward, took this young customer out of her turn, and Sign became very animated in voice and gesture as he resumed the long Ecru discussion. The man had begun measuring again, taking the breadth of one of the windows: his back turned to the shop. No one in all the shop appeared to be in the faintest degree interested in Miss Ellenberger, as stolidly she marched off to get the tape that the boy wanted for his 'muvver.'

She seemed to be gone for an immense time—counting time by one's heart-beats it seemed that she would never come back again. Lifting one's eyes, as at last she returned carrying two or three bundles of tape, one saw an indescribable change in her heavy face. It was as though Miss Ellenberger had seen a ghost in the corner behind the wall. Vivien thought that Miss Ellenberger was violently trembling.

But Sign appeared to notice nothing unusual. He went on talking all the time that Miss Ellenberger was completing the transaction, all the time that Miss Ellenberger was going to and fro when she returned to store the tape bundles—an interminable disquisition on these Paris Ecrus. Then at last he desisted; stood for a few moments picking his teeth nonchalantly; and, when he had restored the toothpick to his waistcoat pocket, slowly sauntered up the shop. Then, almost at once, there came from the back room a roar as of a wild hyena.

'Who done this?' He had reappeared with flaming cheeks, and he stood bellowing in the doorway. 'Mr. Ronalds—Come 'ere. Quick,' he shouted to the man.

The wretched, terror-stricken girl had not in either of her visits removed the warning paper.

'Now who's Number twenty-one?' Pring was shouting from the doorway. 'Miss Gregory! Who's got book twenty-one? Twenty-one! Damn it, why don't you answer?'

Poor little Miss Gregory had begun to cough. Seeing what an appalling storm had burst, she was trying to shield Number twenty-one as long as possible.

'I am twenty-one,' said Vivien.

Of course it was quite useless to think of escaping detection. Each book was numbered, and each page was numbered. You could not possibly void a page without being discovered. It was only necessary to look at the book and at the bills in Miss Gregory's possession to find out where the void lay.

'Oh, by God are you? Come 'ere. Quick. And you—Ellenberger, come 'ere this minute. Now we'll see. All right, we'll see.'

There were customers in the shop, but at this moment Pring cared little for customers. He was beside himself with fury. He stamped and raved, and brandished his arms at the two girls after he had banged the door behind them in the little room. The man—Mr. Ronalds—had been examining the bait in the trap. Not a coin was missing.

'Now,' said Pring. 'You two thieves don't leave this room till the police come to take you out of it. Yes—*you*, you 're in it my lady—and the worst of the two p'raps when all comes out. . . . *You* wrote this,' and he waved the bit of paper before Vivien. 'You wrote it and you can't deny it.'

'I don't deny it.'

'You don't. All right. And now—you—Mr. Ronalds—you go and fetch the police. No. Send that boy of yours and stay here with me to 'elp me if they try to get away.'

But Mr. Ronalds counselled, if not moderation, at least a little less precipitancy of action. He would like to ask a few questions, and he strongly advised the young persons to answer him. He began with Miss Ellenberger.

'You saw this writing and you read it?'

'I don't know what you mean.'

'Come now, none of that. You see this very bit of paper in the drawer and you read these words. "*This money is marked.*"'

'I never been near the drawer. I never touched a thing in the drawer.'

'No. Because why.' You read this writing.'

'I don't know what you mean.'

He never got beyond this recurrent opening stage in his examination of trembling, rolling-eyed Miss Ellenberger. Then, while Pring fumed and spluttered, he questioned Vivien.

'You wrote this writing. You've admitted it yourself. Now why did you write it?'

'I wrote it as a warning.'

'Ah! That's just the point. How come you to think any one had marked the money? How should you know anything about the money? How should you know the money was marked?'

'I did not know: I believed. I believed it was put there to tempt people to steal it.'

'Why did you believe that? Why should you suspect?'

'I shall not tell you.'

'You won't tell me?'

'No.'

Then Mr. Ronalds drew Pring into the corner and whispered to him. There was nothing to be done. The tall girl was straight—a mar-plot, a spoil-sport, but nothing more. The Jewess was the thief all right. But the tall girl had done them in the eye. Very annoying, but nothing more for them to do. No good talking about the police. No good calling the blundering, muddling police till you had fairly caught your game. He urged Pring to be reasonable. But entirely reasonable Pring could not be.

'All right. Then out you go, the pair of you. D'you hear what I said? I'll bundle the pair of you into the street this minute—and not a thing do you take out of this house but what you stand up in. . . . Oh, don't you try your dam-princess tricks with me. Be off, I say, the pair of you.'

This was when Vivien in her turn was threatening police intervention. Very pale, very breathless, very defiant, she declared that she would reappear with the police at her back if he attempted to detain her box. And again Mr. Ronalds, the private inquiry agent, took the raging Pring into the corner and urged him to be reasonable.

'All right. We'll see. But you don't move from here. I'll have your boxes brought down, and I'll have 'em searched first and you don't leave this room till they are outside in that street.'

But with more argument from Mr. Ronalds further concession was made.

'I give you ten minutes to pack your traps,' and Pring opened the door and bellowed for Miss Russell. 'Miss Russell, you go up with em and watch as they don't nab anything—and take

Mrs. Schofield to 'elp you. They're two accomplices. Two accomplices.'

Then came the question of payment of salary due to this date. It was three weeks and three days since last pay-day. Rapidly calculating the amount, Vivien made out that Pring owed her nineteen shillings and ninepence without spiffs, and this amount she demanded.

'You must pay me what you owe me.'

'You may whistle for it . . . Go to law and welcome. We'll see. It's all I ask for—to be 'eard in a court of law. We'll see then. Not one farthing do you get from me. You and your accomplice have had more than enough out of my pocket and the pockets of my staff.'

In this matter Mr. Ronalds did not interpose. Pring was on safe ground here. If he chose to wait to be sued for the money, well and good. Miss Ellenberger, with quaking limbs and sterterous breathing, made no claim for payment. All that she seemed to desire was to get away into the open air.

'There they go,' said Pring for all to hear in the shop. 'Two sneak-thieves. Two accomplices. Two accomplices. Princess Touch-me-not. Princess Light-Fingers.'

And with such opprobrious cries he would have followed them to the street itself, when the very big trunk and the very small one came down, had not Mr. Ronalds thrown arms about his waist and forcibly pushed him back into the shop.

Mr. Schofield had gone out and summoned a loafing man and a hand-cart. It was a dismal foggy night with a drizzle of rain, and the light from the shop windows made the outer world look black as ink. Miss Gregory was coughing dolorously; behind the two counters the girls were all pale and trembling, too frightened to think of speaking to either of the exiles, had they desired to do so. These were the dispiriting conditions under which the pale Princess and her heavy-breathing companion departed from Pring's.

She had exactly seven shillings and fivepence in her pocket. With this capital she was called upon to face the world once more, and already something of this fund was hypothecated to meet the claim of the loafing man with the hand-cart. No bargain had been made with him, and in fifty yards—long before they had emerged from Cuthbert Street—he was affecting distress, pretending to be a man exhausted nigh unto death by the labour of propelling the big and the small box. At the end of a hundred yards he gave out altogether. He had been told to go to the end of the street and there receive further instruc-

tions: but he wanted now to learn where next, how long was the martyrising journey to last, how much was he to receive as the price of his agony.

No one could plunge into the battle of life with the great box impeding one. It was necessary to deposit it as soon as possible in some safe place, and then, free from the costly burden, begin the fight. She decided that the cloakroom of the North London Railway Station was the place for the box, and she told the man this was the goal.

'But where are you going? Where is he to take your box?'

'I don't care. Same as yours. That 'll do,' said Miss Ellenberger, looking behind her and shivering, only anxious, it seemed, to get far away from Pring's in the speediest possible manner.

Then at last a bargain was struck and the loafer consented to go on. Eighteenpence to be paid: one shilling for the big box, sixpence for the small. It was cruel work, but he supposed he was in for it and he would go through with it. Side by side in silence the two girls walked along the crowded pavements: Vivien keeping a watchful eye on the cart, Miss Ellenberger only using her dark eyes to look behind her, and guiding herself by keeping in touch with her comrade's arm.

The streets were full of people to-night. Strangers were talking to strangers; men were reading aloud from newspapers in the glare of the shop lamps, gesticulating, shouting at street corners. From the dark sky a cloud of doubt and wonder had fallen, and melting in the gas-warmed atmosphere, had been converted into excitement and noise.

Far and near, on dripping newspaper-boards, and limp, draggled bills, to-night there was one word only in monstrous black capitals—War! Near the station, where a newspaper cart had stopped for three moments and then gone tearing onwards, a drove of newspaper boys came racing and spreading through the streets. Like a flight of dirty London sparrows, pretending to be carrier-pigeons, they flew fast and silently down every avenue. Then pausing, opening the bundle, draping their knees with the new bill, they burst forth in their night song, filling each street with their hoarse cries.

'Victory of Glencoe! Defeat of the enemy. Splendid victory. British General wounded. En-e-my to-tally rou-ted.'

And the pink papers themselves seemed to fly—from hand to hand, far and near, fluttering into windows, beating their pink wings in doorways, rising in flocks to perch upon the tops of omnibuses.

Even their box-pushing man was excited and stimulated to brave effort. Arrived at the station he boldly claimed another

sixpence to drink to further victory. A stalwart porter wished to share the glorious refreshment with him. But the man in the cloakroom wanted nothing—except to be left undisturbed while he read his pink paper.

When they became free of the boxes and free of the loafer, it was time for the comrades to part.

'Want me to leave you? Mayn't I go with you?'

'I don't even know where I am going. First I have to go and see about something. I must say—good-bye.'

This was on the badly lit pavement outside the station yard.

'I understand,' said Miss Ellenberger.

'Where are *you* going?'

'Don't know. Never mind. I'm all right.'

'You have money about you? I mean enough to do with?'

'Plenty,' and in the darkness Miss Ellenberger blushed. Have *you*? Look here. Take some from me—plenty for me—too much.'

'No thank you.'

'Good-bye,' said Miss Ellenberger. 'Look here—Want yer to know this. You've saved my life. I'd 'ave poisoned myself. I've got the stuff. Always made up my mind to swaller it—if found out.'

'How long have you done it?'

'Years an' years. . . . It was a man learnt me to do it. . . . Oh well—he got me in his power. I was a fool. He was a brute. O 'e *was* a brute!'

'Don't do it any more. Say you won't do it again.'

'I'll try. Good-bye,' and Miss Ellenberger offered her hand. 'God bless you for what you've done. Now give me a kiss and good-bye.'

But Vivien hesitated.

'I understand. Never mind. God bless yer,' and Miss Ellenberger turned on her heel and moved off.

Then Vivien stopped her and kissed her.

'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye.'

Now she must begin to think. But the first thing to do was to go and see the dog. Oh Imp, oh Imp, you little know what trouble has come upon both of us!

She found him to-night in the little harness-room. Lying on an old horse-cloth under the table he looked comfortable enough, but rather languid. He came out, stretching himself, and he complimented her on her happy inspiration in looking him up thus unexpectedly—but he paid his compliments, licks and wags, perhaps very languidly.

'Oh Imp, don't say that you are going to be ill!'

But the man reassured her. He understood dogs: the dog was all right. The man was a good fellow, really. He pulled a curled trace and a blacking brush from the wooden seat of a chair; wiped it with a stable-rubber; and invited her to sit down and talk to the dog at her ease.

Sitting with her elbow on the table, her chin on her hand, the dog's head against her knee, she thought out her next few moves in the game of life. Her own head was aching; her legs were aching; she felt crushed with an overpowering fatigue: as though she had been walking for hours and must sit in this chair for many more hours before she recovered strength to go on again. Oh Imp, don't say that either of us is going to be really ill!

This was what she would do. To-night she would make her way to that girls' club in Soho and take shelter there. At the club she could get a bed for about sixpence—she was not sure, but in those pamphlets sent to her by Mrs. Gardiner, sixpence, she thought, was the charge mentioned for a good comfortable bed. This would be another sharp descent in the social scale. She would have dropped from the ranks of the amateurs through the real 'shoppy' class into the world of the factory girls. She had read all about these girls in the pamphlets. They came from the jam factories and the tobacco factories and the soap factories, and at first they were—some of them—almost young savages. But enjoying the nice club, they became cleaner and nicer and brighter and more tractable—ceasing to slap each other's faces in the music-room, abandoning the horrid oaths over the friendly game of bagatelle—until in fact they became very nice indeed. She was not afraid of the factory girls. The one dreadful objection to the club was—Mrs. Gardiner.

She had sworn to herself never to seek help from any of those people. But stern necessity was driving her. Pride must yield to fate. Pring's had crushed much of the pride, beaten out the hope, slowly obliterated confidence in one's own power. She must take this much succour from that old world: the use of a bed for a night or two at Mrs. Gardiner's club. With any luck, she would escape being seen by Mrs. Gardiner. Mrs. Gardiner did not live at the club. Mrs. Gardiner could not know all the wandering girls who chanced to visit the club.

Then, thinking deeply, she counted out her money upon the harness-room table. Five shillings and ninepence left! Ninepence was sufficient for bed and supper. Five shillings would make the dog secure for another week. Yes, she must do that. In the struggle that was coming, it would enormously help her

to be free from immediate fears for the dog, to know that for more than a week her dog was safe. There was no risk in doing this—now that she had owned herself beaten, and had determined to use the club. Ninepence for to-night: to-morrow she must somehow manœuvre the old box across London to the club, find in the box the last saleable or pawnable treasure, and begin the great hunt for bread. At the club there would be people—secretary, manager: Mrs. Gardiner's subordinates—who would give her good advice, who would if necessary lend her money for the box-moving; or she could pawn her jacket—but all that was to-morrow. To-morrow would take care of itself. It was already getting late. It would be quite late before she reached Soho. She must go now without delay.

So then she paid the man another week's dog bill.

'It may not be convenient to come and see him for some days. So don't be surprised—and—and I rely on you. You will, you *will* take care of him?'

And then she said good-night to dog and man.

As, at last, she came very slowly down the dark little street in Soho, there was noise and laughter and shouting of men's voices. The newsboys, flying and crying, had just swept through the street. Men talking French, men talking Italian, and terrible women, not talking, silent leering, hung about the street corners. There was a crowd outside a foreign restaurant, and a little Frenchman was making a speech from the window of the first-floor dining-room. 'Vive les Boers! Vive les Boers,' he yelled as she worked her way round the back of the crowd; and then there came a crash of glass and a roar of laughter. A British patriot or a grateful continental ally had hurled an empty bottle or a brick through the plate-glass above the speech-maker's head.

A policeman in Dean Street had told her that she could not fail to find the club—a big blank wall: a newish building. She felt, as she passed in through the hospitably open door, that she must sit down for rest upon the stone floor.

She was in a white-washed, narrow hall, from which stone steps led upwards. Electric light came from white saucers in the ceiling; in a tiny office the guardian of the door—a large, middle-aged man in spectacles—was reading one of the pink papers; there was a warm comfortable odour from underground kitchens; and sounds of ivory balls and hard cushions, girls' voices, laughter and scraps of song told of club life in full swing.

'Well miss?' and the man looked at her over his paper and over his spectacles.

'I want a bed for the night. . . . You—you have a bed disengaged?'

'Oh yes,' and the man looked hard at her. 'We've disengaged beds; but I don't seem to know you.'

'I have never been here before.'

'No. That's what I was thinking. You can't come in here this way.'

Then came the dreadful explanation. This was a club: not a lodging-house.

'Don't you know what a club means?' said the man, explaining. 'This is same as any other club—a place what is only for the use of members. You joins the club, you pays your subscription, and then you haves the privileges of the club.'

It was a terrible, long-delayed, retributory consequence of the smattering, garbled, inaccurate studies under poor old Mrs. Maitland. She had read the Gardiner literature and failed to grasp these primary truths. It was a hideous irony of fate that the daughter of Colonel Shelton should thus in her hour of need be taught the most salient characteristics of the meaning of the word, club.

Two happy factory girls—members—pushed by her and went prancing up the stone stairs; and in despair, faint, hungry, weary, she pleaded to be allowed to go up also. All pride was gone.

'I know Mrs. Gardiner. I am sure she would wish me to have a bed—whatever the rules are. I could join the club—afterwards—to-morrow.'

'You bring me a written order from Mrs. Gardiner and a bed you shall have.'

Then she asked him if she would find Mrs. Gardiner at her private house.

'Well you know—it isn't my place to give you Mrs. Gardiner's private address. She's to be found here most days.'

'Oh I know where she lives—Greville Place.'

'Yes. That's right. But if I was you, I wouldn't go disturbing her to-night. Leave your name with me and come back in the morning. She'll be here any time after eleven and she'll see you then.'

But of course the spectacled porter reading the paper in his snug little office was not Vivien outside in the drizzling rain, fearful of this ugly part of the labyrinth, and with only ninepence in her pocket. Had he been, he would have understood how difficult it was to act in accordance with his advice.

Mrs. Gardiner's private house, when at last she reached it,

XXXVIII

SINCE May Lady Colwyn had not once seen her grandson. Lord Helensburgh had left her in anger, and the Duke of Morecambe had not come to make peace. There had been business communications—cold and brief as despatches of state—at the time of the late duke's death. If her ladyship desired to be present at the sombre rites within the Abbey, a suite of rooms would be prepared for her at Morecambe House, the gloomy mansion in the square, and it would be better for her to be here than at the other grim old house in Dover Street—and so on. But his grace counselled granny to spare herself the fatigues of attendance at the ceremony. For a little while she extracted comfort from this advice. He was thinking of her with kindness. But then again thought robbed her of her solace. He did not wish to see her—that was all he really meant. And she, too, wrote briefly and coldly: she would not be among the mourners in the Abbey.

Cold and stern and unbending—letting none see her wounds—she suffered now. She had lost her boy and he would never come back to her.

She was not allowed to forget the cause of her secret pain. Mrs. Gardiner had written to her—an impertinent letter. Replying at once, she had told Mrs. Gardiner in the fewest possible words exactly how the letter had struck her; but, in consideration of Mrs. Gardiner's birth and lineage, she had condescended to justify herself—in the fewest possible words—for the recent act to which Mrs. Gardiner had taken exception. Then Mrs. Gardiner wrote—at great length—to tell Lady Colwyn that the previous letter had not been an impertinence—far from it. She told Lady Colwyn much about the duty of trustees, and all about those higher authorities whose opinion was of such infinitely greater importance than the opinion of Mrs. Gardiner. These shadowy powers sooner or later looked through the record of all trust-transactions, and no breach of trust escaped their scrutiny and detection—and punishment. To them, and not to Mrs. Gardiner, Lady Colwyn would assuredly be forced to explain her conduct, and it would be quite futile

to try and shuffle out of the ordeal by telling *them* that they were impertinent. 'You say you had reason to think that she would soon have ample funds at her disposal. That can only mean one thing. She was in your care, and instead of guarding her from temptation you were pushing her towards temptation. Was it nothing—to drive this girl into the man's arms? But you have not done so. And I think that you should humbly thank providence that you have been saved from what might have happened.'

Thus the mild Mrs. Gardiner, bristling with indignation: forgetting all the respect and circumspection proper when addressing the great Lady Colwyn, and describing the Earl of Helensburgh and the future Duke of Morecambe as 'the man.'

Lady Colwyn grimly endorsed this very improper letter and put it away in her archives. When people went about the world with factory girls their manners were likely to deteriorate. She supposed that Mrs. Gardiner knew what she was talking about —to this extent. The girl had not joined his lordship in London. That was somewhat curious.

Those solicitors in Lincoln's Inn Fields wrote to her again and again—with gross impropriety. But of course persons of that class are not supposed to understand what is proper. They desired her to send all Miss Shelton's letters to their office unless she had received other and direct instructions from Miss Shelton herself. 'Instructions!' They desired her to inform them without delay if she heard from Miss Shelton. They desired that she would adopt all the measures in her power to discover Miss Shelton's present address, and then request Miss Shelton to write to them.

She replied to the solicitors, by the hand of Mrs. Gouldsmith, the new lady-in-waiting, and used the third person.

Often, sitting alone in her rooms, or driving with Mapleton and Mrs. Gouldsmith, she thought of the insignificant cause of all her trouble and bitterness of spirit. She thought of the girl herself without the least anger or resentment; and indeed was magnanimous enough so completely to sever in her mind the innocent cause from the disastrous consequences that she could even think of the girl with something akin to wondering admiration. She was not to blame. She had simply been an instrument of fate. She was one of a thousand such instruments that fate might have employed to produce the quarrel. Except in this—thought Lady Colwyn: the girl had proved herself to differ in material from the other nine hundred and ninety-nine girls. These would have been more plastic to circumstances, of

softer fibre: yielding promptly to the pressure of external forces, they would, by removing my lord's anxiety, have removed my lord's grievance against herself.

She has resisted my lord's desire. Curious! She has shown pride and strength. She is different from those others. She is the girl who burned that Hacketts letter. She has understood —she was not a fool!—what my lord's interest and care would mean. She may have a pretty little house in Mayfair, or one of those latter-day inventions of Satan, a *flat*, as they call it; she may have fine clothes, fine horses, fine carriages, a place on the river in the summer, a large room with a big bed and sofas and arm-chairs and wardrobes and writing-tables on an ocean-going yacht; she may have two or three of those more abominable inventions of the evil one—motor cars;—all these things my lord would provide in the natural course of events. But she turns her back on them—disappears, hides herself: will have none of the good things on the terms offered. Thinking of this with a certain wondering admiration, Lady Colwyn owns that she misjudged her late lady-in-waiting.

In the blazing August weather the daily drive used to be postponed until an hour after tea-time, and one evening as she stood on the steps beneath the great porch she asked her old question.

'Are your horses fresh?'

'Yes my lady.'

'Good.'

Then she turned to Mrs. Gouldsmith, who stood slightly in advance of Mrs. Mapleton. They were both dressed for the drive.

'I shall not require you with me. I forgot to tell you.'

The miserable Mrs. Gouldsmith was already doomed. Sentence had been passed; she would disappear in a fortnight; she had signally failed in giving satisfaction in her high post, and had destroyed herself without assistance from the favourite. She now meekly retired, and Mapleton with a smile took one step forward.

'Nor you either,' said Lady Colwyn. 'I prefer to be alone.'

Then, from her seat in the carriage, she spoke to Mr. Slade.

'Take me through Tellhurst. Then work your way round and take me up to the down—to the top of the down, and drive me right along the Ridge.'

'Yes my lady.'

'In this dry weather the cart tracks will offer no difficulty.'

'No my lady.'

'But you must not allow your horses to slip when you get upon the dry grass.'

'Oh no, my lady.'

Then away they rolled. Fast and free the big horses swung along the dusty roads, through sleepy Tellhurst and its bowing citizens, by thick cool woods and wide burnt fields, until after an hour they settled down to a footpace as they began the long upward climb. Lads whistling in the narrow lanes fell silent as the carriage came slowly lurching and bumping in the deep ruts, and watched in loutish wonder the tall footman opening and holding the gates. Higher and higher, twisting and turning, the carriage climbed: past the lanes, by the rough cart tracks, through innumerable gates—panels and harness flashing fire in the sunlight, smoke beginning to rise from the smooth-coated horses, and the small black figure of the solitary old woman rigid and upright in spite of all lurchings and bumpings. At last the bare down was won, the tracks disappeared, and Mr. Slade was driving at a cautious trot upon the hard turf.

'Now tell him to let his horses walk again.'

'Yes my lady.'

She was looking down upon her territory, spread out like a map at her feet.

'Now tell him to stop. No. Do not get down.'

Except for the chink and rattle of bit and chain it was as though carriage and horses, coachman and footman, and the small black old woman had been turned into stone. The black rooks sailing in a black stream were drawn from their course by wonder, and the black wings beat slower, and nearer and nearer. At her feet lay the silent woods and the stretching fields; more fields, more woods, the rich, fair plain; villages that clustered round old church towers; the river winding beneath many bridges, going to lose itself in the marshes and come trickling out in tiny rills upon the yellow sands. The sun was sinking. Above her head the evening breeze was moving slowly, languidly drawn by the hot earth from the distant sea; and over all things: air and earth and water, there reigned to-night—not Lady Colwyn, but the spirit of unutterable sadness.

'Now drive on again. Take me to the end of the Ridge.'

'Yes my lady.'

Her old lips twitched and jerked, and she mouthed with protruded chin, as though talking to herself sternly and fiercely. Two or three times she raised her hand to her forehead and held it above her blinking eyes.

He was the head of the house. He was the ruling prince: she was only the old neglected forgotten dowager princess. Surrender to your prince does not count as defeat. It is the end of

rebellion, not the beginning of vassalage. What did it matter if good pride lay smarting, if just anger was forced to bend to the dust? Sitting here on the high ground—far above the smoke from her village chimneys, the chatter of her subjects—old and lonely and forsaken, she told herself that nothing mattered but her aching love for her boy.

And that night she wrote to tell him so.

'What does it matter to me? What do I care? If you say that I should take her back, I will do so—' It was the cry of surrender, wrung from her by her torment. Peace with our prince on any terms. 'Find her and bring her back when you will. You are all that I have in the world. And I am old—deal gently with me.'

Then, at last, he wrote in kindness to her.

He was sorry that he had spoken harshly—very sorry. He quite forgave her—but he said now 'in this matter I cannot forgive myself.' It was too late to undo the mischief. The girl should not have been sent away. The girl could not now be reinstated, because the girl could not be found.

'But it is very good of you to say you would do what I asked. I am quite sure that you ought to have done it, or I would not have asked you. I hope to come and see you again before long.'

Yet the weeks passed and he never came.

At last, in the dismal October weather, at the time when all England had been roused from its long sun-warmed torpor, a telegram arrived.

'She has been found. I am coming down to-day.—Harry.'

He came and at last the peace was ratified between them.

XXXIX

VIVIEN had been three or four days in the quiet little house in Greville Place, and as yet had not been to see the club. She was not going to be ill. The doctor told Mrs. Gardiner that all the guest needed was rest and care and kindness; and Mrs. Gardiner gave these medicines in full measure. Our young friend, said the doctor, had come very near to a serious breakdown. Had she been one of our young friends at the club, he would have opined that overwork and insufficient nourishment lay at the root of the matter. But in the case of our young friend upstairs, doubtless the lassitude, weakness and exhaustion had been produced by psychical rather than physical causes —worry, grief, disappointment: in short, any of those injurious conditions from which young ladies moving in the best society are not immune, and which for them are the equivalent of those more solid ills to which our club-girls are naturally heir. But now she would do very well. Mrs. Gardiner had taken the case in hand just in time.

She slept as though she would never wake again. She went to bed absurdly early; she got up absurdly late; and the brief day—while Mrs. Gardiner was out and about, bustling, toiling, organising—passed in a swift dozing reverie. She sat in Mrs. Gardiner's own little study or library—a pleasant, bookish, businesslike room at the back of the house. Here, in a deep chair by the fire, with an open, unread book, too tired to read, too tired to think even, she used to feel that Time's pendulum had been swinging backwards for her, and that she was half-dozing, half-dreaming in Mrs. Maitland's room during the holidays.

There was a latticed front to one bookcase as at Mrs. Maitland's; on a writing-table there were big account-books that might have been old Maitey's school ledgers; and on the mantelpiece and wherever standing room could be found, there were frames holding photographs of girls—just like the old school-girls. There were even washy, feeble water-colour drawings—presentations from grateful incompetent girl-artists. And, in truth, when very lazily one thought of it, there was nothing strange in all these points of resemblance between that old room

and this new room. Mrs. Gardiner's life had been as busily employed in looking after girls as had been Mrs. Maitland's.

Vivien never wanted to go out of doors again. This quiet fire-lit room was world enough for her. She wished that Time's pendulum would show her another kindly phenomenon, and stand still for her so that the holidays might go on for ever.

One afternoon, as she sat in the firelight with the unread book—too lazy to work the electric switch at her elbow, she heard Mrs. Gardiner's voice in the hall. Mrs. Gardiner had just let herself in with her latchkey, and she was bringing some one with her. The visitor was being taken into the front room. Then the two voices could be heard: Mrs. Gardiner's voice and a man's.

Vivien laid her open book upon the table and sat watching the door on the other side of which the man was talking. Presently the door opened and Mrs. Gardiner spoke to her.

'Vivien! Turn on the light, dear. The Duke of Morecambe has come to see you. He has come as an ambassador.'

'I am very glad to hear that you are better. Mrs. Gardiner tells me that you have been far from well.'

Mrs. Gardiner, after introducing the visitor, had returned to the front room and shut the door behind her.

'I really have come as an ambassador—from my grandmother.'

He was in black and he looked taller and thinner. He stood on the other side of the hearth, resting his arm on the mantelpiece.

'She has written to you—my credentials! I told her I would give the letter into your own hands.'

He had changed inconceivably. Something had gone from him; something had come to him. Was it possible that you could change thus because people called you Duke? It was as though the burden of all his new honours had aged him already. He had been the laughing heir-apparent: now he was the grave and passionless king. He was much thinner; his eyes had dark circles round them: when he smiled, no light played on his pale face.

'She wants you to go back to Hawkridge. Will you read her letter?'

Something akin to Dr. Quinlan's solemn gravity had, it seemed, come to him—a lifeless intonation that robbed his voice of the old boyish music; and the Duke spoke slower than Lord Helensburgh used to speak. He was changed—incredibly changed.

'I hope you will do as she wishes.'

He had not attempted to shake hands. He had not called her Vivien. He did not call her Miss Shelton. He did not call her anything at all.

'It is very good of Lady Colwyn to write to me. . . . Thank you. . . . Won't you—sit down?'

'Dear Miss Shelton,' said Lady Colwyn. 'I am sorry that I misjudged you'—Vivien's eyes filled with tears. This was much—much, from the great lady—'I shall be pleased if you will return and stay at Hawkridge as before. I have missed the assistance that you were good enough to give me, and I shall be glad to have your assistance again. I hope that it will be convenient to you to come to me at an early date.'

It was an astounding compliment—there was no other word for it. Vivien was completely overwhelmed. She held the letter in a trembling hand—making a good fight, and succeeded in escaping from the great peril of those too ready tears.

'I hope,' his grace said, 'that you will send back the ambassador with a favourable reply.'

'I don't know—I don't know if—'

And then she remained silent, fingering the stiff glazed notepaper. She was longing to go. If she was compelled to leave this quiet room, she would like to go to Hawkridge—to that splendid asylum from the working world and the ugliness of life. She had made her poor little struggle, and she felt herself beaten—hopelessly defeated. In her lassitude and weariness she could not think of beginning the fight again without terror. Lady Colwyn had wounded her pride most bitterly. She had felt that she would rather die than take help from that cruel hand; and yet now, with a few unexpected words, the great lady somehow seemed to have wiped out all sense of past injury, to have changed smarting pride into melting gratitude. 'I am sorry that I misjudged you.' Each time that she thought of the wonderful words, an extraordinary thrill of grateful pleasure brought the moisture back to her eyes. Much—much from Lady Colwyn! And it seemed, as she thought of it, that the great house itself was drawing her back with invisible unsuspected strings that had bound themselves about her heart; that the woods were whispering to her to come back to them; that all the fair domain from the ridge to the sea cried to her to come home.

'What is it that you don't know? I am sure that you ought to say yes.'

She was longing to go. She thought now of Lady Colwyn with a strange unreasoning tenderness—old and stern, girt about

with senseless pomp and childish prejudice, and yet beneath all the foolish trappings innately grand, slowly subjugating one's imagination, forcing reverence even while one analysed and criticised, making one so keenly anxious to win from her one slight sign of regard that in the long-continued fruitless effort one came very humbly to love her oneself. And suddenly she longed to hear her voice again, to listen very humbly to any scraps of information that fell from the proud old lips. Oh, after all the *h*-less horror of the fancy drapery, to roll by her side on cee-springs and hear again those measured accents of calm magnificence: 'The person we splashed from head to foot with the mud from our carriage wheels is the Colonel of the Tellhurst Volunteers. He did not mind. He is a very respectable person—an auctioneer by profession. I sometimes employ him,' etc. etc.

'Let me help you to make up your mind.'

Above all, the thought of her dog made her long to go. To see him once more safe and sound in those splendid stables, to know that mews-dangers had rolled behind him as a troubled dog-dream, that his guardian and protector was none other than the great Mr. Slade—

'I think—I would like to ask Mrs. Gardiner,' and she moved towards the door.

'Yes. But there is something that I want to tell you. You will not see me there. You need not fear—my company. I give you my word of honour that—you will not see me at Hawkridge.'

It seemed that he had intended—was trying—to say something else, but that, the planned phrases failing to get themselves said, he relinquished the attempt.

'I am going away,' he went on. 'For the winter at least—perhaps for longer. I shall very much like to think, while I am away, that you are down there—and that my grandmother has you for a companion.'

'Thank you. Yes, I should like to go—but I must first ask Mrs. Gardiner.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Gardiner. 'I think it is very right that you should go. If I had not approved, I would not have let him see you,' and then the kind soul explained her thought.

She would have wished to keep Vivien with her, indefinitely, until some pleasant opportunity for good suitable work could be found—because work was wholesome for girls—in moderation of course; and she was making a sacrifice of personal inclination in allowing her guest to leave her. But the plain fact was that her old friend, Lady Colwyn, had acted very badly in sending

Vivien away. People might jump to wrong conclusions, and make nasty thoughtless remarks as to *why* Vivien had gone.

'That is why it is essential that you should go back now that she has asked you—it is the very least that she could do. The duke understands that. You must stay with her for a month or two; and then, my dear, you can consider yourself free, and come back to me whenever you like. And now,' said Mrs. Gardiner, 'you need not see him again. I will go and tell him that you will write to Lady Colwyn by to-night's post to say that you accept her invitation.'

A big closed landau had been sent from Morecambe House to convey Mrs. Gardiner and her guest to the station. Behind the ducal carriage came a four-wheeled cab with the dreadful old box on top, and Mrs. Gardiner's elderly parlour-maid inside. Wearing a bonnet, and well satisfied with the prospect of the day's outing, the parlour-maid was to act as courier and chaperon until the young lady had safely reached her journey's end.

At the station they were met, first by the duke, and secondly by the man from the mews and the dog.

'Well Imp, how are you?' said his grace, patting the dog's head. 'Tired of London, Imp?'

He did not call the dog Pincher any more. He was in a long black coat with astrakhan collar and cuffs—just such a coat as papa had worn; and sycophantic officials of high rank hung about him, and walked backwards as though he had been a royal personage. He was changed—incredibly changed: many years older, with a solemn aloof dignity that seemed to clear a space all round him when they reached the platform, as though invisible barriers had been set up about the reserved compartments by invisible policemen.

There was a smoking compartment and a non-smoking compartment, and idle curious people had been reading the white labels with awe-struck attention. 'Reserved for the Duke of Morecambe!' Both compartments! Now, at a respectful distance, these foolish people—quite well-to-do travellers among them—stood fascinated, pretending not to stare, wishing that they need not stare, but fatally compelled to stare. It was exactly as though a small royal party from the adjacent palace were being despatched.

Vivien and the bonneted maid and the dog entered the non-smoking compartment, and Mrs. Gardiner told an official to lock the door.

'You do not mind the dog going in the carriage?'

'Oh no my lady. No indeed my lady. What harm can the

dog do? And of course her ladyship wants the dear little dog with her.'

The duke had been speaking to one of his servants. Then he strolled across to the bookstall, and came back with many magazines.

'Shall I open the door, your grace?'

Mrs. Gardiner frowned at the official; and his grace said, 'No, thank you,' and handed the magazines through the window.

Then his grace withdrew to the door of his own compartment, and Mrs. Gardiner talked to Vivien until the train began to move.

The mild Mrs. Gardiner's manner to the duke had been as implacably severe as the laws of courtesy permitted.

At the Hawkridge station there were two broughams waiting for them—one with a wicker-work tray on top, and leather straps to hold the luggage. The duke handed Miss Shelton and her dog into the first brougham; entered it himself; and away they went, leaving the bonneted parlour-maid ruffled in composure—uncertain for a moment whether to telegraph to Mrs. Gardiner reporting the break-down in plan and demanding further instructions, or to follow in the other brougham with the box.

It had been raining, but now the sun shone bright from a watery, broken sky. The copses were wet and glistening; upon the fallen leaves the iron shoes beat dully; the stream, when they came to the first of the bridges, rushed fiercely and noisily—a mud-stained torrent carrying a white froth, round which the yellow leaves swung in circles.

A few months—only five months since she had said good-bye for ever to the wide fields and the old church towers. Never—she had thought—would she see again this long straight road, and the little rise ahead with the stone parapets and the buttress of the next bridge—never again, except in dreams. Only five months since, wanting herself to fly, she had been driven away in dire disgrace because of this young man, and yet now she was sitting by the side of the same man. No, not the same—a different man, from whom she now had nothing to fear.

'I wonder if you will promise me something. I wish you would promise to stay here all the time that I am away. Mrs. Gardiner talked about your going back to her, and finding work to do in London. But I wish you would promise to stay here.'

'I would like to stay—if Lady Colwyn cares to keep me.'

'She will care. When I come back in the spring, it will be so easy for my grandmother to find you something worth doing—easier for her than for Mrs. Gardiner. But stay here till I come back.'

'Where are you going for the winter?'

'To South Africa.'

Wherever the carriage passed, men doffed their hats and women curtseyed. As they came up the village street, all ceased working, laughing, or playing: at windows, in doorways, beneath the arch of the inn yard, men, women, and children watched the big horses and the flying wheels with bated breath. The duke was bringing back the disgraced maid-of-honour. The duke was bringing her back in state.

For months the village had gossiped, had wondered. All that was known behind the baize doors of the great house was known on the ale-house bench and in the shop-parlour. There had been trouble at the great house, stormy scenes between their lady and their lord, and all about miss; and then miss, who used to be pleasant enough when she came shopping with her dog, had sunk beneath the storm. They had seen her go forth into banishment. And all through the burning summer they had chattered and marvelled. Still trouble at the great house, although miss was gone—their lady and their lord nursing their anger: house, village, and all the little realm put into disgrace in their turn by my lord, who would never come amongst them again. They had waited and watched, but never a glimpse came to them of their duke till four days ago.

He was bringing her back in state. She herself understood it now. He waved to the vicar, to the postmaster, to the old saddler waddling to post a letter: he wanted all to see and understand what was happening. They had seen how she went away, let them see how she came back—side by side with their duke. She understood now: this was rehabilitation. He was doing it as an act of justice and penance. It was good of him; and he had told her—and shown her by voice and eyes—that never again need she fear him. He was changed—beyond belief. And, as they passed on through the bowing village, she thought of this good deed of his with a strange, humiliated gratitude.

Once only in all the drive did he speak in Helensburgh's old foolish voice—and that was to the vicar's wife bowing and staring near the open gates of the park.

'How do you do Mrs. Roberts?' and he gravely smiled as he took off his hat. 'I am very well thank you, Mrs. Roberts; but none the better for seeing your ugly face. Good-bye Mrs. Roberts. They ought to send you out to frighten the enemy.'

And Mrs. Roberts smiled and cringed and writhed, all unconscious of these ducal compliments; and then stood staring till the great gates shut with a clang behind Miss Shelton returning in state.

The carriage stopped at the stable quadrangle, and Imp the dog

was handed out and received into the hands of waiting grooms. He exhibited no elation. Mews or castle—it seemed all one to the dog. He trotted away meekly towards his old palatial quarters, and Vivien observed with surprise that he did not even look round for the stable cat. The journey must have tired him.

Up the grand staircase, followed by the watchful menial eyes, and through the lofty corridors, where painted eyes looked down at her thoughtfully and statues seemed to point with their stone hands, he led her to his granny and completed the long ceremony of reinstatement and reparation.

Lady Colwyn in her chair near the fire, laying down her knitting, and rising to receive the visitors, was so completely unchanged that it was difficult to remember that one was returning after five months, and not after five minutes.

'Miss Shelton, I am glad to see you again,' said Lady Colwyn with her grandest manner. 'I hear that you have been ill. I was sorry to hear that.'

Then she turned to welcome her grandson, and in another minute Vivien was graciously permitted to retire.

'I will say good-bye, Miss Shelton,' said the duke, offering his hand. 'I am going back to London this afternoon. Good-bye.'

He had called her Miss Shelton at last. Till then he had not called her anything at all.

On the way to her old room she met Mrs. Mapleton, who was obviously lying in wait for her. Mrs. Mapleton's manner had undergone a remarkable change since last they met. Mrs. Mapleton was timidly cordial, humbly effusive. She said the presence of Miss Shelton at Hawkridge once more was a sight for sore eyes.

'But lor', miss, you do look porely. Never mind. Our good air will soon build you up again. Your very own room, miss. I saw to that. Mrs. Garnet was for making an alteration, but I *knew* you'd prefer your old room—more *home-like*. So I mentioned it to her ladyship . . . oh her ladyship has missed you. We've had two—Mrs. Gouldsmith, and Miss Leonard—but they couldn't please her ladyship nohow. It would make you laugh to hear the hot water they was always in with her ladyship. Miss Leonard was 'ony given her marching papers four days ago—when the *good* news come as we was to have *you*, miss, back again—'

All the afternoon granny and her boy sat talking together very happily. She had recovered him completely: he was talking to her now as in the old days when he used to work at his school-books in the long library—telling her all his thoughts.

'Well, Harry? Are you content at last?'

'Yes. The thing has been like a nightmare to me. Now I can think of other things.'

And that was all that they said about Miss Shelton.

The re-establishment of Miss Shelton was an act of justice—nothing more. All this trouble had been laid at rest during their last interview, when the conditions of peace had been drawn up. He had told her that the girl was to be left in her charge during his absence, and then, as soon as he came back, they would provide for her elsewhere. Then they would have done their duty, and no one—not even Mrs. Gardiner—could reproach them. While the girl was there he would be far away. No one could hint that this was an arrangement after the Hacketts mode, and Lady Colwyn was satisfied that no unworthy motive lurked behind his wish. Surrender had brought no dishonour. His transient folly was over: equilibrium had been restored, as Lord Penrith had said.

In this interview he made her understand that the other—the older folly was also ended. He was free from that long entanglement. He had done with all the follies of youth: henceforth life for him was to be very serious business.

To-day they talked much of the war.

Lady Colwyn was as angry about that insolent ultimatum as though the cartel of defiance had been brought in at the big porch and hurled down at her own feet. But surely 'war' was too noble a word to use in such a connection. To her mind it seemed but as an outbreak of peasants: a matter for the police—stern, prompt repression certainly, with magistrates perhaps and troops of cavalry. If a real war—one of the old great wars—yes, then naturally her grandson must go. But surely it was not necessary that the head of the St. Kevernes should be present in person at the quelling of this rustic outbreak.

But the head of the house thought differently.

'It may of course be all over before I get there. It ought not to be a long job, now that people know what we have to do.' And then he explained to his granny some of the difficulties of the situation as they had been explained to him by his soldier-friends. The soldiers were treating the matter most seriously. The flower of the army was going; all the *corps d'élite* would be there—one would be in good company if, after all, it turned out to be nothing more than a sort of military picnic.

He stayed with his granny as long as he possibly could; and then, after bidding her good-bye very tenderly, he went back to London to prepare for his winter trip to the South.

XL

THE great house and its mistress were absolutely unchanged; the quiet routine of the days moved on the old noiseless wheels with a rhythmical undeviating precision. Vivien dropped into her old place very easily. The servants, always watchful and attentive to her as to a theoretical member of the family, were now perhaps more solemnly obsequious than of yore. It seemed that doors were more carefully closed as she moved about the house; that more trouble was being taken to hush the growling and squeaking voices in the world behind the scenes; that the watching eyes at the windows on the hidden staircases had something of awe in them as she walked in the garden by the orangery. The return in state had produced its due effect in the palace as well as in the village.

But on no one had the effect wrought so strongly as upon Mrs. Mapleton. Words failed Mapleton to express her great sense of rejoicing. 'Now, miss, we shall get on again—we 've been all at sixes and sevens while you was away. I was only saying to Mrs. Roberts this morning, now her ladyship has *you* again there 's no need for anybody to be anxious—we shall go on merry and smooth *now*.' And then, meeting with coldest acknowledgment of these compliments, the carneying tongue faltered. 'Mrs. Roberts is just as pleased as I am. She ask me to say so,' and Mapleton bustled away; and, prowling about the corridors, trembled. She had made a mistake; instinct should have warned her to desist when, mining, she first felt the rock; she had pitted herself against a mysterious unrecognised force and now she trembled. Sincerely she wished that she had left Miss Shelton and the fates to work out their own problems.

Mrs. Roberts, failing to obtain an interview, wrote a very kind little letter.

'Now that you have come back,' said Mrs. Roberts in conclusion, 'I do not suppose I shall be wanted for the drive. But if it would ever be convenient to send me with dear Lady Colwyn when you do not want to go yourself—well, my dear Miss Shelton, you may rely on me at any time.'

Many people—besides those two staunch allies, Mrs. Mapleton

and Mrs. Roberts—said they were glad to see her; and these others she believed. Mr. Frensham, the old librarian, was extraordinarily glad to see her. He chuckled and rubbed his hands—showing her the old lord's table by the window, and telling her that no human form had sat there since she last used it. He was inconsecutive as ever, talking of two or three things at once—the war, the duke, the weather; but he worked a thread of very sincere kindness through the tangled skein of his welcoming speeches. Mr. Slade, the coachman, was glad to see her; and so, it seemed, was Mr. Ferguson, the gardener. Mr. Slade said he had felt lonely for want of the dog; and Mr. Ferguson came laden with one of his sample nosegays, and gave her a cordial invitation to go through his glass-houses when first she appeared in the garden. Dr. James, too, was all kindness and smiles. He had great news from his nephew and his new niece: they were as happy as birds in their island home—the climate, the society were all that could be desired. 'They stayed for a fortnight at Government House,' said Dr. James, 'before they went into the official residence—and the bride seems to have been very much admired. Really Miss Shelton you appear to have done very well for my nephew,' and Dr. James laughed as though he had in view, and was getting close up with, a grand joke. 'He quite put it on you to find a wife for him, didn't he? And, as you couldn't find her by looking in the glass, I am sure you did the next best thing for him.' One other friend was obviously very glad to see her back again, and that was Ellen, the pretty little maid who had wept when she left. She came shyly to Vivien's room to say how glad she was. There had been no one, said the poor little maid, to speak a kind word to her in all that big house through the long summer, and she had felt so miserable sometimes that she'd 'a had half a mind' to go and throw herself into one of the deep pools of the river; and poor Ellen brought out a handkerchief and wiped her eyes. Vivien was touched by the girl's rather dismal welcome. Ellen had deteriorated in aspect. Something of her fresh countrified prettiness was gone; her face had lost its colour and brightness, and had somehow become coarser: she looked as though she had been ill, but she was certainly not thinner. She had not, however, been ill—she seemed almost frightened by the suggestion.

'Oh no miss—I 'm all right. Please miss, whatever you do, don't tell Mrs. Garnet as I 'm not well—I 'm quite well, thank you miss. Good-bye miss. I hadn't ought to have come to see you without Mrs. Garnet's permission, but I wanted to see you again, miss.'

And then Ellen the maid crept away—in fear no doubt lest the housekeeper should find her wandering far from the region of her duties.

It was very pleasant to meet thus with kindness from varied sources; and in these first days after her return she was twice thrilled by a proud, a vaingloriously proud thought. Twice it came to her and brought a lump into her throat, and caused her to swallow automatically as though the great lady had given her an invisible chocolate. On two occasions it seemed that the wonderful sign had come—a gleam of the eye, an intonation, a gesture: indescribable and illusive evidence, as greedily one seizes upon it, that the great lady has for us some slightest fund of regard and esteem.

'Yes, now sit down. Take up your pen'—and after a pause —'Miss Shelton, I have really missed you'; and Vivien swallows the first of her impalpable bonbons.

'The two ladies who were good enough to come here were both incompetent. I could not permit them to write my letters —except to tradesmen and persons of the class—in the third person. They were highly obnoxious to me as companions when driving. . . . My faithful Mapleton has done all that she could for me. But Mapleton is only a servant.'

Then, in the evening, when the moment has arrived for the reading of the *Times*—the old strange reading that once seemed torment: 'Miss Shelton, I am pleased to hear your voice once more'; and Vivien swallows her second chocolate. 'I could not suffer either of the ladies who gave me their services during your absence to read aloud to me. They did not know how to read aloud—they made the blunders of quite common people, and their accent was not the accent of gentlefolk. . . . It was very curious. Each had, I believe, trained herself to speak properly; but in reading aloud the natural defects came out. Now go on, if you please.' And Vivien reads that General Burford has been appointed to——

'Stop. Who is General Burford? Take down Kelly if you please. Burford is a very good west-country name. See if you can find this general among the west-country Burfords.'

The method of the reading has not altered in the slightest degree.

She had much to learn of changes external to the great house, which had come to pass in these few months, but which had not been noted by her or others in Cuthbert Street. Death had been busy, Mr. Frensham told her—an astonishing number of victims in high places. Lady Stonehaven had been 'taken off' —before the old duke. Lady Stonehaven had died at Cannes,

early in June, when she and her lord were the only visitors of distinction left in that place of flowers and fashion. 'Broken-hearted—Lord Stonehaven—Gone right away, the duke told me. Round the world—never come back—the duke thinks heart-broken. . . . And a name you 've read in the newspapers, miss. Constantly see it—Mrs. Arncliffe—the beautiful Mrs. Arncliffe—a name we all know very well.'

'You don't mean that Mrs. Arncliffe—is dead?'

'No, no miss. Mr. Arncliffe. Died at Brighton—June I think it was too. Great invalid the papers said.'

Then death had given her freedom at last. The hour that she had waited for had come to her very slowly, but her chance had come at last. '*You* see. She'll be Duchess of Morecambe, and we shall all bow down to her.' Would Lady Augusta's words come true after all? Did Mr. Frensham know? Did Mr. Frensham suspect? Who could say what flashes of clear light came through the ragged screen of Mr. Frensham's thought-curtains?

'But you should have been at the funeral in the Abbey, miss. Astonishing sight—grand, very grand,' and suddenly the flash came through, and Mr. Frensham described it all exactly as though he had been there himself. For a moment he made one see it: soldiers with their helmets on their heads—very curious, every one else uncovered of course; nobles and princes—one, two, three princes; bishops—four of them; velvet pall—white and purple, and the empty coronet faintly glittering; and the duke—the new duke—standing alone, drawing all eyes—quite the grandest figure there, though all in black—no uniform, no ornaments. 'Every one felt it, miss. What I always said—do great things now. If you 'd seen him in the Abbey, you couldn't doubt it.'

'But were *you* there, Mr. Frensham?'

'Yes miss, he placed me among the mourners. Astonishing compliment I thought it. Knew I should feel it so. Very considerate always. Wrote to me himself asking me to go.'

Certainly it was good of him to remember the old librarian when inviting the funeral guests.

'Greatly changed, miss—the duke—in this summer. Ten, fifteen years older—mind opened. Only the same in this—just as kind as ever—just as considerate—*more* considerate.'

Mr. Frensham had noticed the change. It was true then: not merely in her imagination. He was changed—incredibly changed.

A sealed packet had arrived from Messrs. Clifford, Atkinson

and George; and this, in the form of letters that had been re-addressed from Hawkridge, contained more kindness. Marian, in two long letters, fully confirmed the gratifying news conveyed by Dr. James. Marian's happiness bubbled and overflowed from the thin paper, crossed itself in almost illegible back-currents, and then rushed on into races of unpunctuated rapture. 'My dear grows fonder of me hour by hour and minute by minute and I worship the ground his dear feet tread on—any ground. Chelsea or the West Indies are all one to me. And oh Vi when I think I owe it all to you oh Vi I cannot tell you what I think,' etc. etc. There were three letters—also deficiently punctuated—from Lady Augusta. Why had not Vivien gone to her dear Augusta? When would she come? Her dear Augusta was in despair because her dear Vivien was wickedly hiding herself and driving all her friends out of their minds because she refused to answer not only letters but advertisements in the papers! What did Augusta mean by that?

Mr. Clifford, senior partner of the eminent firm of solicitors, explained what Augusta meant. Mr. Clifford had been alarmed by his young friend's disappearance, and had therefore been issuing a very carefully drafted advertisement to the daily press. He enclosed a copy thereof; and he much regretted to state that he had only desired to see Vivien in order to assure himself that she was in good health and so forth. The advertisement might convey the erroneous impression that he had some good news to impart—as for instance that the late Colonel Shelton's estate had realised more than had been anticipated. Unfortunately, far from this being the case, it had realised less than their estimate: there was nothing, absolutely nothing to come to Miss Shelton. He begged of Miss Shelton that, as a personal favour to him, any future disappearance in which she might indulge should be only partial, and not operative as against her family solicitors. He begged her at all times to consider his firm as her legal advisers, representatives, and—if he might say so—her sincere friends.

When one thought of those unpaid accounts crossed off in the firm's mighty ledger, it struck one as a wonderfully kind letter.

Thus, easily, luxuriously, soothed, lulled with kindness, she sank back into her splendid refuge. By all that she had known she could now measure the height of her good fortune. It had been nothing to come here from Marefield Street—an exchange of a comfortable room for a more comfortable room; idleness and sloth, instead of light and amusing labour. But now she had

risen from horror and darkness, to peace and light. She had been where life flows deep. From Pring's to Hawkridge was the passage from the place of torment where thought meant soul-sickness to the blessed abode where thought meant nothing at all. That—coming back to it—seemed the secret of the great house: there was no need to think. That perhaps was the secret of life itself—known to the girls in that wonderful life-waiting-room of Mrs. Maitland's school, but forgotten when we reached the foolishly desired life-train in which the grown-ups sat gnawing out their hearts because the train had no fixed destination and would never reach anywhere in particular. This was the final philosophic truth: life was only bearable while you ceased to think about it.

Already her health was almost restored. For the second time the good food and the good rest had done the good work. Already Pring's was an immense way off, dropping behind faster and faster—a bend that had been turned, a zone of darker shadows left far behind one in the vast dream-grotto. Ten days, a fortnight—inconceivable that fifteen days ago she stood in Sign's parlour to be brow-beaten by the professional thief-catcher. But no need to think of that, no need to think of anything: all well now, nothing to think about, all well—except Imp.

Imp the dog was ill.

Two days gone, and philosophic truths swept up the chimney on the whirlwind of fear. She thinks now of the companion of her exile, and could not by any imaginable effort think of anything else. Soft beds, kind words are nothing. Great ladies, fancy drapers, dukes, and sneak-thieves are indistinct phantoms moving vaguely outside this hot circle of scorching light in which we stand waiting for fate to sear our heart. War and national humiliation are nothing—less than nothing: a beating of a child's drum, a child's fretful cry coming to us faintly through our prison walls as we sit in our condemned cell and wait for the prison bell to begin tolling. Our dog is very ill.

He had shown no pleasure in his sudden change of fortune. Mews or palace—it was all one: he only asked that people would refrain from taking him for walks. Then Mr. Slade summoned the stables physician—the trim man whom Vivien had often seen riding about on a short-tailed bay, the polite man who used to sweep his felt hat down to the top of his gaiter as Lady Colwyn rolled by. The vet said the dog had been poisoned and prescribed emetics—castor oil in milk, what not. Then he said the dog had influenza. Then he said the dog had something else. He was always suggesting different remedies

for different diseases: anointing the dog for incipient eczema, drenching the dog for the last stage of liver trouble. Then all at once he was quite sure the dog was down with distemper. Mr. Slade thought that distemper was, in a dog of his age, very unusual. 'But it is the unusual that always happens,' said the vet. When he heard that the patient had been residing in a London mews, he was certain that it was distemper, and that the dog was coming through it very nicely. They might now give him all the food and drink he would take. The dog took very little of the food; but he took all the drink, and rapidly, unmistakably, grew worse and worse.

'I'll tell you what, miss,' said Mr. Slade, one evening after the vet had gone, 'we're just torturing this dog.'

The dreadful words drove Vivien almost mad. She had suffered agonies when assisting to administer the unceasing medicines—the dull eyes praying that he might be left in peace while they dragged him from his bed and poured the noxious drugs down his parched throat. And now Mr. Slade said that he believed that it was all useless torture.

For a couple of days they went no more to the medicine shelf; and the vet, to their surprise, applauded them. Good. They were falling back on nature. After all, nature was their best ally. Mr. Slade looked at the vet with something very like contempt on his grave face when he heard this maxim.

Mr. Slade was her only support. He was full of sympathy; handled the dog with extraordinary gentleness; was with the dog early and late. But his face became graver and graver, and one morning he told her that he had almost ceased to hope—in fact, could only hope for a miracle. It was a ghost of a dog that through her tears she was looking down at. Without food he could not live, and he could not eat because food infallibly made him sick. All that he piteously craved for was water to moisten his dry tongue and lips, and now water was making him sick. A nest had been built for him by the fire in Mr. Slade's sitting-room, but he would not stay there. Very feebly he pattered across the room and lay with his nose against the door, feebly asking to be carried down into the stable.

And hot knives went through her heart and her brain and stabbed and tore at her throat, as the dog tried to wag his tail to tell her he was glad to see her, and, when she knelt by his side, tried to lick her hand and then sank back exhausted from the attempt to tell her not to grieve because this was one of their very last meetings.

She was walking about her room thinking—forcing herself to

think, desperately fighting for reasoned thought, telling herself again and again that in this world only reasoned thought can bring about a miracle.

Is she so feeble a wretch that she is to let her dog die? She loves it but cannot help it. Then how contemptible a thing is her love. And she forces herself to assume the true physician's attitude: to shut out emotion and *think*—good sane thought, not throbs of brain fever.

But the image of the dying dog returns, and her heart is torn again and the gust of emotion rises to her brain. With clenched hands and bitten lips she struggles. It is a hard fight to win the region of thought—firm ground at last to stand on for an instant, and then the wave of emotion sweeping over it, leaving it soft quicksand again. But she fights bravely.

No hurry really. Great physicians never hurry. She bathes her eyes, dips her face in the cold water; walks about again; then goes down to the library, and talks to the old librarian.

'Mr. Frensham, I want you to help me. My poor little dog is so ill—dying, unless we can find something to cure him. What books have you?'

'About dogs?—dozens of volumes—very interesting too. Sit down Miss Vivien.'

Rapidly Mr. Frensham brings down his treasures: covers table, drags chairs, and covers them—snows her up with books; and then stands by, opening and shutting volumes as he hands them to her.

'*With Horse and Hound!* There, miss—pictures too. *Historic Kennels.* Here's another! *The Dawn of Fox-hunting*—richly illustrated. *The Blood-hound: Its origin and its future. La chasse au cerf*—you read French, miss?—very interesting. *Grande Vénerie!*' And all the time he goes on talking, giving her a brain-addling commentary, in his most characteristic manner.

'Yes to be sure. Dogs! An ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory. Dogs—like people. Four-footed friends, aren't they, miss? Man's noblest friend—Gastritis very likely. No, that's the horse—the noblest friend. Terrible thing Gastritis too. Here's another—*Our English Dogs.* I knew a dog die of that. Pomeranian in Dover Street—next house to ours—in the old lord's time. Gastritis, ten to one. Worst foe to dogs, the London vet said.'

'Oh Mr. Frensham, why do you keep saying Gastritis?'

'Well miss, what are the symptoms?' and he whirled the leaves of the volume in his hands.

Then, while she tells him, he looks into his book, and soon begins to read extracts.

'Great thirst—vomiting—uneasy attitude—extended on stomach on coldest surface to be found, fever, sleeplessness, restlessness—Ten to one, you may depend upon it.'

As she listens, she believes, and asks to hear more. But, whirling the leaves, he instantly passes on to Glanders.

'There 's a fearful thing, Miss Vivien, Glanders! Dogs can't get that. Horses. Worst foe to horses. Frightful.'

Then, with her hand upon his arm, she recalls him to the point; and soberly and calmly Mr. Frensham tells her that her dog is dying of Gastritis.

She thinks hard. He is so often wrong, so erratic in judgment. Can he be right now? Holding her temples, deaf to the running commentary, she resolutely reads the book. Yes, the light has flashed through the haze of words. She will give the dog the book-treatment. Then she goes out to Mr. Slade and tells him that the dog is to have no more plain water—not a drop. He may have some ice to lick. He is to be given at once some brandy in a dessert-spoonful of soda water. The same dose in an hour. Then some patent extract of meat—a tea-spoonful. Then some meat jelly. Later, if he retains the jelly, etc. etc., he is to have some raw meat grated into a powder. He is to be kept very warm with blankets and a hot-water bottle.

And at Mr. Slade's nod the waiting grooms fly: to fetch ice and jelly and old liqueur brandy. Look alive there! Sharp's the word. This is not a mews, but a palace.

It was in the middle of the second night after the book-treatment had begun. She had been with him until an hour ago, and then Mr. Slade had sent her away. Mr. Slade was sitting up.

Ellen the maid was also sitting up—with permission of Mrs. Garnet—to act as messenger and escort between the house and the stables. Draped in a loose ulster she sat by the fire in Vivien's room, dozing in her chair until she should be wanted. With clenched hands and burning eyes, Vivien paced to and fro. Unless hope came before dawn, hope would never come. Half an hour passed and she roused her messenger. Mr. Slade had said she might ask for news in an hour and a half—not before. She stood outside her door as the maid crept slowly away. At the end of the corridor, the night-watchman with his safety-lantern was waiting in a blaze of electric light. Out went the electric light, and the twinkling lantern made the shadows dance; then the man's whispering voice came once or twice from the darkness; footsteps sounded upon stone stairs; bolts

creaked, a chain fell, a door closed. Then there was nothing to do but walk to and fro with clenched hands.

The messenger had been gone for an immense time—half an hour, forty minutes, nearly three quarters of an hour. What did it mean! No—not that! Not *that*! She was dragging her cloak round her shoulders when, in the dead silence of the sleeping house, the far-off locks and bolts rang loud. The messenger was returning. It was difficult to read the words on the crumpled piece of paper that had come back from the stables. One line:—

'*The dog has eat his choped meat and now sleep comforbly. Slade.*'

'And Mr. Slade he says, miss, you may safely go to bed, miss. He will not go to bed hisself but stay with the dog. Mr. Slade,' added the messenger, 'he waited to make quite sure and now he know the dog have taken a good turn.'

Never since, years and years ago, Bauermann with heavy footfall came to still our pain, have we known this ecstasy of relief. And it is true now: no kindly-planned Teutonic fiction to stop the throbbing in a child's brain, but the glorious truth which reasoned thought cannot shake and pierce and snatch away from us.

She received many congratulations during the swift convalescence of the patient.

'It is with great pleasure' wrote Mrs. Roberts 'that I have learned from our good Mrs. Mapleton of the complete restoration to health of your pet. In case of its being ill again, I wonder if you have ever heard of cod liver oil biscuits? both for cats *and* dogs. They are alleged in the advertisements to be *most* digestible.'

'Miss Shelton,' said Lady Colwyn, 'I hear that your dog is doing well. I was glad to hear that.'

Then our good Mrs. Mapleton made her demonstration outside the presence chamber.

'You don't know what that was—from her ladyship. On'y to fancy! Her, as simply can't abide dogs—never mentions their name. But of course, miss, she knew how annoyed *you'd* have been if the dog had died.'

'One thing, miss,' said the great Mr. Slade. 'I've done with that joker. I knew he was a pretty poor hand with horses, but dogs I thought he might know. Dogs are a mystery to me.'

'But you have saved him.'

'No. *You* did that, miss. Except so far as arguing from one thing to another, I am helpless with dogs. I know what a

horse wants; I know what a man wants; and a dog's wants must be somewhere between I suppose.'

Vivien came back to tell him that if he had not saved the dog, then Mr. Frensham had saved the dog; and there Mr. Slade agreed to let the matter rest. The dog was saved. What did it matter who had saved him?

When, driving with Lady Colwyn, she saw the trim man on the bay horse, she understood that the blow had fallen. There was mournful, dignified, outraged pride, and sad, aggrieved innocence in the face of the vet as he made his low sweeping bow to the passing carriage. The edict has been promulgated. Never again will the joker ride beneath the archway of the big quadrangle.

XLI

THE cruel lesson of the war was beginning.

The lords and the knights had ridden forth to chastise the peasants—and the churls were winning all along the line. No, not winning—but holding the knights in check. Already the wonder of the thing was unfolding itself. Not armed with scythes and knives on poles?

'Have patience,' said Lady Colwyn very sternly. 'Yes. We shall see—we shall see.'

But, as the lady-in-waiting read out the telegrams in the newspapers, the red blood used to rise to the white hair, and sometimes there came a flash of hot wrath from the shaded eyes.

'Stop. Give me the paper. I will read it myself.'

Then with protruded chin she would sit mouthing and muttering, hiding her face with the printed page.

'So few killed—a mistake. Well, we shall see—but so few killed.'

Twice, when the anger flashed, she had called Vivien 'girl.'

'Be patient, girl. I tell you we shall soon see now.'

And once when the impudently familiar favourite expressed a candid but uninvited opinion on recent news, she was swept into the corridor with such a flash and roar that it was as though she had been blown from the cannon's mouth.

As one man the lords and the knights had leapt to arms. All were going—all we had ever seen, all we had ever heard of: that Lord Rotherfield, Sir John Hartnell—even the old Scottish marquis. Lord Stonehaven had been in Japan, said the papers, when tidings had come to him of the peasants' rising. But he was homeward bound now; his clansmen were arming; militia might be wanted for garrison or fort; the old chieftain would be ready at the head of his clan. One name from the knightly roll was missing as yet. Instinctively she had looked for it. Cruel and treacherous and mean, still he must be counted among the knights. Was he altogether a renegade?

And in the train of the vast host, safe behind the glittering spears, the fair ladies were to be borne on litters or come riding

on sumpter mules. Wonderful to read of! Like painted moths, like coloured flies, the fair ladies had begun to flop and flutter. Never could the world have seen such camp-followers as these. Name after name—one read of them—the fashionable dames whose knights were going a-riding. Committees, sub-committees, dowagers and débutantes sitting in solemn conclave in the drawing-room of Crœsus to count the money for the wounded men-at-arms: passing in review the pretty Red Cross sisters; marshalling our married beauties on ball-room staircases; launching them at last as an incredible corps de ballet to dance to the roll of the drum and pirouette and curtsey amid the shrieks of the dying. Amateur base hospitals, amateur field hospitals, amateur hospital ships, to be equipped, controlled, and conducted by amateur ladies of distinction—what are amateur bonnet-shops to *this* bit of fun? Husbands, lovers, discreet friends shall find those melting eyes and yielding lips ever within reach round the corner while they fight for the honour of their country.

Busiest among the Red Cross coryphées is the beautiful Mrs. Arncliffe—courageously forgetting her bereavement, stifling her paroxysms of grief, wiping away the last tears with the sleeve of her new nurse's gown, springing into brilliant life again: a leader of the ballet, a dragon-fly darting through the pretty moths. Her portrait in the nursing dress is in every illustrated journal; her name is the mainstay of the personal paragraphist: she and two other famous ladies are to have a hospital ship to themselves; a whole floor has been taken for them at a Cape Town hotel; their motor-cars are already on the high seas.

'I am going with Johnny,' writes Lady Augusta in exuberant high spirits, 'and it has been the most frantic rush to get anything like a fit-out in the time. They all say Cape Town is to be exactly like Paris the winter after Waterloo—everybody you meet in the streets are buying frocks for South Africa—whether it's over before we get there or not they say once there we shall all stay till the spring. Johnny has sold all his horses to the War Office simply royally and then bought back two which they cast for himself for half nothing—he says they are the best of his string. Write to me and wish me luck—they are all playing *fearfully* high on the way out and don't run away again till Johnny and I come marching home.'

Wonderful, too, it had been to read of the young Duke of Morecambe ere he sailed away to the South.

He had been a subaltern in the Household Cavalry and he had grown weary of his splendid servitude. He had been in the army and he had gone out of the army; but now, in a

moment, he was back in the army—not humbly returning to do goose-step, or in any wise to begin again at the beginning, but as duke or leader of men. He was appointed to the staff of a great general, and the general was to be congratulated on the happy selection. Then this piece of information was cancelled: the press had been a little premature—you are lucky, my lord general, if you get him, but you have not got him yet. His old sumptuous corps want him. We, the glittering three, are thinking of combining forces and sending a composite regiment. But nodding plumes, red and white, and breastplates that break into white flame in the sunlight must be laid aside—no *levée* day beneath the planes of St. James's Park: drab reality out there. These knights must leave their shields at home—and let those who love us keep them bright and clean.

Drab reality—that, as one gathers, is in truth the cry of the soldiers though Parliament still cries Picnic, picnic.

Most wonderful! He was a lieutenant in the army, but a major, a colonel as soon as he went out of it. Major of yeomanry—his own yeomen, who with their horses were born and bred on his northern land—he has this autumn called out a squadron and exercised it in warlike arts week after week at his own charge. It is a unit that he may call for in another place. Honorary colonel of militia, recruited from his midland principality—he has been examining the cadre, considering how it may be filled if need come. Colonel of two battalions of volunteers, his train-bands from his towns—he has inspected them: sat upon a horse while they marched past him, and from his saddle has made a speech to them, carefully reported even by London papers. You are to drill assiduously, to give ready and cheerful obedience to the officers I leave with you, to make yourselves something more than the pride of the pavement, the heroes of desk and till. It may be that I shall require some of you to join me six thousand miles from this town-hall that my revered predecessor built for you.

Vivien, taking Imp the convalescent for short walks, thinks of it all—yeomanry, militia, and volunteers—and wonders. Imp for three days has barked at the stable cat, and each day his voice has been clearer and sharper. It is five days since the duke sailed. In the shipping intelligence there has been no mention of the *Durham Castle* as Sighted, Passing, or Touched at. She wonders if it is a rule of war-time that no such information must be published.

Lady Colwyn's vassals did not propose to mix themselves up with this quarrel. Driving, Lady Colwyn stopped her carriage

once or twice and interrogated her serfs—likely young fellows dragging huge cart-horses into hedges to make space for their lady, or in cottage-gardens plunging their spades into the heavy earth with untiring vigour.

'My man, are you going to join the colours and go out there to fight?'

'No, I bean't.'

'Drive on.'

Or stopping once more for a few words with the good-wife who puts down her basket to curtsey with full ceremony.

'Well, my good woman, have any of those big sons of yours enlisted? Are they off to fight?'

'No my lady, they bean't.'

From the ridge to the sea the warlike spirit seems dead. Is it that because of some mysterious bond of sympathy they cannot bring themselves to point rifles against those other peasants, or is it some coldness of the blood that comes to those who stand too long beneath the shadow of castle walls? Too much protection, too deep obeisance before too much greatness seems to have taken the heart out of them. Or is it only a consequence of very remote causes: a latter-day reaction after undue ancestral effort? Here, by the southern sea, those far-off barons in their petty local squabbles have dyed the soil with this same peasant blood too freely and too often. Now, let them as made the quarrel be the ones to fight it out.

From the ridge to the sea only one man gone: one man, from Tellhurst, the son of our respected fellow townsman, the corn-merchant in the market-place. He has been sent off with *éclat*: address presented by the mayor; a supper for sixty covers admirably served by mine host of the St. Keverne Arms; exquisite flowers and choice pot plants kindly lent for the occasion by Mr. Ferguson, 'who is never backward in coming forward when by placing the Hawkridge green-houses at the disposal of the public he can add to the happiness of the greatest number.'

It is curious that, whatever fuss is made about people here in England, no more is heard of them out there. They have landed—that is the last time you read their names. The drab curtain has fallen: the actors in the drama are hidden from view.

Thus it was with his Grace of Morecambe. The *Durham Castle* has arrived—then silence.

Real news is not now to be expected, the newspapers frankly confess. We must be satisfied with what the press-generals,

operating in arm-chairs and planning the campaign between the inkpot and the tea-tray, can tell us is about to happen. This is a purposeful pause. Great events are approaching maturity. We shall soon see what we shall see.

It is Lady Colwyn's only comment.

'Yes. We shall see now. We shall see. I tell you, wait in patience,' and the faint flush rises to her frowning brows, and she digs her knitting needle into her ball of wool.

Yes, they must learn their lesson—these insolent peasants. It is the punishment hour in the school of life—insolence must be made to smart.

Yet, in spite of her reiterated advice to others, Lady Colwyn herself cannot wait patiently. The long pause is becoming unendurable. Granny must have the curtain lifted to get a peep at her boy. All she wants to know is exactly *where* he is at this moment—nothing more. It is obvious that the War Office is fully occupied, must take things in their order of importance: private inquiries must be held over until the public is answered and so on—any attempt to add to the burden of official labour would now be thoughtless, selfish, and wrong. Lady Colwyn of Hawkridge, presenting her compliments to outer rooms in Pall Mall, is well aware of this, and says so as neatly as one can say anything in the third person, but will be obliged if, *without* trouble, the information can be sent at once.

It cannot, and is not. Then Lady Colwyn writes in her own hand, to one of the inner Pall Mall rooms—writes twice on consecutive days. Then she writes and telegraphs to the innermost room of all.

Letters come from Pall Mall, telegrams; and, twice, a special messenger; but only to say that Pall Mall is without data to enable it to answer the question. However, steps have been taken; the cable is at work; Lady Colwyn shall be advised immediately, when the information arrives. Vivien, seeing the special messenger driving in a fly, watching the postman crawl along the park road with one of the telegrams, thinks of what the wise old Scottish lord had said to Lady Colwyn. A private post office in the great house would be useful to its mistress now.

'Not slept last night?' says Dr. James. 'Come, that's not what we would wish, is it? Let me see, this is the third night that her ladyship has been without sleep. Yes I should be glad to see her if you could arrange it for me.'

Dr. James hunts for no jokes this morning as he talks to the lady-in-waiting presently, in the corridor.

'Great powers of resistance, Miss Shelton, very great. But

still, you know—great age. Sleep is very necessary, but one hesitates to resort to drugs—one really hesitates. We must hope that this anxiety will be removed—speedily removed.'

Then, as they walk down the corridor, Dr. James explains that it would not matter if he or Vivien lay awake for ten days or a fortnight.

'Not that any one is the *better* for lying awake, you understand. But luckily you and I have nothing to break our repose. I am uncommonly glad to think that nephew of mine is safe and snug in his island. Good morning.'

In the course of that day another War Office messenger arrived with the desired information.

The Duke of Morecambe is advancing on the extreme west of the strife-area, with my lord general and the fine flower of the British army. And there, on the west—in confidence be it spoken—may next be heard the roar of the guns; and there, on the west, one may look for the fiercest fighting.

Nothing now to break the orderly routine of the great house, which seems hushed into a strained attention during the long, long pause. My lady is sleeping again, eating, driving, knitting again, but talking very little. The old reading has been abandoned: articles, if read aloud, must be pushed through to the last line without troubling Burke or Kelly. The round-about bookstand has fallen into neglect. Atlases and gazetteers have come into favour. Mr. Frensham arrives from the library with big new maps; stands at her ladyship's elbow; and directs her needle as it advances on the far west. Downstairs in the library Mr. Frensham has hung one of his maps and transfixed it with pretty little Union Jacks on its western side. All the invisible eyes behind the windows of the garden front seem to be staring out towards the south.

Vivien's thoughts are now always of the war. In this connection the recently discovered secret of the house has proved no secret at all. War is something that you must think about. It might have been supposed that because of its remoteness this war would sink into the colourless zone of the unimaginable, be reduced by sheer distance to insignificance—a struggle of red and brown ants which no mental microscope can grapple with. But far from this being in fact what one feels, it is, rather, as if our thought, flying across the measureless ocean fields, gained strength in its flight and brought back to us a clearer picture than if the potential battle-ground had been in the next county, instead of six thousand miles away.

One night, as Vivien sat reading to herself in Lady Colwyn's

room, she came suddenly upon a paragraph that concerned itself with the Duke of Morecambe.

The paragraph was a part of a long, chatty article by 'our military critic,' and here for the first time the trains of camp followers were treated with severity. The pretty ladies would have been more useful if they had stayed at home, organising relief for wives and families of the poor combatants, holding bazaars and getting up concerts, and by all means collecting funds to send professional nurses. As a crowd of fussy and helpless amateurs, out there they would be an intolerable nuisance, etc.

And as troublesome—said our military critic—and as out of place as smart ladies were these dukes who expected to be provided with saloon carriages, kitchens on wheels, and four-post bedsteads; who went to see the war much as they went to see the Grand National: not because they could ride or were fond of riding, but simply because it was the right thing to do.

Our critic made his reader flush with indignation by the time she reached this point.

'As a typical example, let us take the Duke of Morecambe. Here is one young man who probably will cause as much thought and worry as a whole brigade. He is to be taken care of and jealously guarded from danger—*ça va sans dire*. In no sense a fighting machine, of no possible assistance in any possible emergency, he must have bogus duties assigned to him lest ducal susceptibilities should be rubbed the wrong way; and, because of his rank in the peerage he is to burden the thoughts of a harassed general when his thoughts should be free from all trivial considerations as to social status, and all his mind devoted to surrounding himself with a business, working staff. We mention this particular duke as a type only. He is one of several.'

'Oh Lady Colwyn—in this paper there is an insolent—disgraceful attack on the duke. They say—but you must read it. I am sure that you ought to write to the newspaper about it.'

'But I thought,' said Lady Colwyn very grimly, 'that you did not approve of writing to the papers.'

'Oh, but this is different. This is an outrage—while the duke is away—'.

'Give me the paper.'

One would almost suppose that it was not Lady Colwyn but Vivien who had been left in charge. Her hand shook with indignation as she gave the scurrilous rag to her employer. That armchair critics, safe at their sordid ease, should defame

the fighters! These knights have left their shields. Let those who love us keep them clean.

The wrath of Lady Colwyn flamed up in a moment.

'Yes. Yes. Indeed I will write. We will see. Take up your pen.'

'I meant—I thought you would write through your solicitors—not yourself. But to tell the solicitors to threaten them, make them apologise, bring actions against them—and get them put in prison if they don't publish an apology.'

This was the course eventually adopted. Her ladyship wrote the letter to her London solicitors, and not to the editor of the paper.

It was one of the most respectable of papers, and in three days—to use the phrase of Lady Colwyn's solicitors—it climbed down very handsomely. Really our military critic had put us in a hole. For once, as one might say, we had been caught napping.

We regretted to learn that certain words of ours had laid themselves open to a possible interpretation immensely wide of the intention of the writer. With regard to the Duke of Morecambe: one desired at once to say that he was a man whose presence would strengthen and stiffen any fighting force in the world. His name alone would strike terror to the enemy. This we said without rodomontade, irony, or any reservation of any kind whatever. The name of St. Keverne was part of England: it was intimately associated with its past greatness and its present glory. It was a name to add prestige to any cause, lustre to any company. Descendant of this illustrious fighting race, where should the present head of the family be looked for but where in fact he was: in the front of the battle's array? Where that formation was situated we were not permitted to state. But this we could say: the Duke of Morecambe held no staff appointment on any general's staff. He had very quietly and unostentatiously taken the most prominent place he could find in the fighting line, and for tidings of that line we should not now have many weeks longer to wait.

Re-reading our words of a recent issue we found it somewhat difficult to understand how any one could suppose that this was not what we were endeavouring to say from the very beginning. But analysing them once again we now saw how hasty readers, who never stopped to weigh the logical import of what they were reading, might rush off with a totally erroneous inference. For leaving a loophole for the extraction of false impressions we took unfeigned pleasure in now expressing ourselves deeply sorry.

XLII

SUDDENLY the drab curtain was lifted.

In the rain and mist towards the end of this slowly creeping month of November, the news flashed homeward day after day. The western army was victoriously advancing, winning the ground inch by inch: in carnage undreamed of beating back the desperate resistance of our enemy, then sitting down on the ground that has been gloriously won. With a gasp of relief England seems to sit down also, to try to recover its breath. Enough news within these last breathless days to glut the most curious.

For the first time Lady Colwyn has used the word war, and spoken of the enemy.

'Now, as I said, we shall see. Show me exactly, Mr. Frensham. The enemy fell back to this point—Put in your flag. Then to here. Give me the flag. Then they were driven back to here. Good. Now Mr. Frensham we shall see. The war has begun —now we shall see.'

The head of the house was right: as he must be—nearly always. He could not have stayed away from this. Whatever we may suffer now, we could not wish that our boy were safe at home. But another purposeful pause has been promised us—a breathing space in which we may think only of past victory. Nothing more will be done for days, possibly for weeks. From Pall Mall has come this certain information. Once more there is to be a silent pause.

Vivien has seen that name for which almost unconsciously she had looked so often. Captain Claude Stanford of Irregular Horse has been mentioned in a supplemental despatch. Cruel and treacherous—but not a renegade!

'I do not think,' said Dr. James during this second silence, 'that you can possibly overdo the driving. If I were you, Miss Shelton, I would endeavour to get her out early and late.'

And Dr. James drew an odd parallel. Had Miss Shelton observed the court news and the columns of gossip lately? Dr. James had taken particular note during the last fortnight, and had been much interested in observing that another aged lady

—an even greater lady—had immensely increased the usual amount of carriage exercise; had been taking the most extended drives. Now this—if you thought of it—was a strictly analogous case. Great strain undoubtedly; anxious care of the wisest heads; skilled hands adjusting the programme of these dragging hours; no thought spared by the strongest professional brains of England in the effort to reduce the strain so far as may be humanly possible! Dr. James has been fortified in his proper self-confidence by the discovery that his own unaided thought coincides with the wisdom of the great masters in council.

'And—Miss Shelton. If I were you, I would not endeavour to make things too easy for her—secretarially, and so on. I would not try to write *all* her letters for her. Let her write for herself whenever she shows the inclination. Give her more to do rather than less—You see what I mean?'

'Yes—yes. I understand.'

'There is a natural disposition to shield people of advanced age from worry—and annoyance. But a mistake often. Servants, friends, all combine you know to guard the great from little troublesome thoughts—just when *we* want the mind occupied—kept normally working. Watch the court news and you 'll see nothing of that sort going on *there*. More business than usual—business invented if necessary.'

After this conversation with Dr. James it was impossible, as we drove on our extended round, not to think of the other driving lady. Jog, jog of the grey horses, by lane and park and forest, hour after hour; men doffing their hats at cross roads; women and children bobbing and curtseying—'Wait. Now we must wait in patience. Now we shall see, my lady-in-waiting. We shall soon see now.' A wonderful parallel of Dr. James's. Driving early and late, only one difference presents itself to our thought—we have no outrider, on blinkered grey horse, jog—jog—jogging ahead of us. But invisible escort we have now always: Dread rides by our carriage wheels; and Horror is riding behind us, following, shadowing, drawing nearer and nearer.

Almost as though fate was acting on the hint of Dr. James, there came, while the silence still lasted, a matter of domestic business that forced attention. While the eyes in the great house were strained towards the scene of the far-off national trouble, local private trouble occurred inside the great house, and in a moment all eyes became introspective.

The trouble had begun with Ellen the housemaid turning sick and faint at the supper-table. From this infinitely humble source

the trouble rose, swelling in volume till the noise of it came through the baize doors and reached my lady. From room to room in the hidden servants' world, chattering tongues had carried the rumour of trouble higher and higher, from rank to rank of the menial community. No baize doors could hold it in: the stone staircases were giving off echoes that could not be hushed. Mrs. Garnet, the housekeeper, felt herself compelled —very reluctantly—to demand single audience. This was not a matter in which her instructions could come filtering through the department of the house steward.

'How long has she been here?' asked Lady Colwyn. Audience had been granted without presence of courtiers.

'Best part of three years, my lady.'

'Ellen? I do not know the girl. I do not think I have ever seen her.'

'No my lady—you wouldn't have. Her place is on the east side. . . . She sleeps, my lady, in one of the old rooms—one of the three what we use above the library.'

'What is her other name?'

'Price. Ellen Price.'

'How old is she?'

'About twenty I think, my lady.'

'And you are sure you are not making a mistake in what you have told me?'

'Oh no, my lady. Dr. James has seen her. I wouldn't have taken it on myself to speak without Dr. James seeing her. Dr. James would tell you there's no doubt of it, my lady.'

'I will see Dr. James in the morning—to-morrow morning.'

Well. The girl has become troublesome: the girl must go. But in this case one cannot be rid of a girl with a word. We do not need a Mrs. Gardiner to direct us in circumstances that are neither unusual nor startling. In great houses and in small houses domestic worries such as these must recur at longer or shorter intervals according to the fluctuations of mere chance. The girl must be removed, but palace-law demands that a certain care shall be taken in the removal. For instance, pounds must be forthcoming from our steward. Lady Colwyn asks many questions, shows no disposition to escape from this trivial annoyance, indeed seems almost glad to have something new to think of.

'You don't know anything about her people?'

No, Mrs. Garnet, moving her hands, and looking embarrassed and perturbed beneath the keen eyes, does not know the Price family. The girl does not belong to the land. She came with a good character. Mr. Richards would have entered in his books

all that is known about her. Mrs. Garnet understands that her ladyship is anxious to ascertain that the girl has people who will treat her kindly, that she shall be taken good care of. That is of course important. Very important. And Mrs. Garnet becomes red and uncomfortable, and looks at the floor.

'She did not tell you that she was secretly married?'

'Oh no, my lady.'

'That is sometimes said on these occasions. It is never true. But engaged to be married? Does she say she is engaged?'

'No my lady.'

'You have made no guess as to who—the man may be?'

But Mrs. Garnet has become deaf, or has lost the thread of the conversation. She looks at the floor and then at the ceiling, then speaks hastily.

'Yes my lady. I'll see that all is done as you direct, my lady—you will give me my instructions in the morning when you've seen Dr. James, my lady?' and Mrs. Garnet is going.

But as though with a painful effort, as one who has something heavy on her mind, but fears to get freedom from the load, she ventures to speak again.

'I did think, my lady—I should say I had thought—that you might perhaps decide, my lady—to keep her here in the house—as best—to be quite sure she was well taken care of—and to stop the talk.'

This is, however, an improper and foolish suggestion. The trouble must of course be removed without delay. These servants are talking: must talk, and our village talk with them. Why in the name of reason should one harbour the cause and origin of the talk a moment longer than is necessary? What sort of an example would this be for others—disgrace discovered and then hidden again within the castle walls? One would suppose that Garnet was a fool—but Garnet, as one knows, is not ordinarily a fool.

Lady Colwyn wonders why Garnet—red-cheeked and stammering—should have let loose so very foolish a suggestion.

In truth, although Lady Colwyn, with other things resuming their dominion over thoughts, now dismisses it from her mind, there is something ominous—even threatening—in the form which this little castle-episode is assuming. The talkers are making more and more noise; the reverberatory stone passages give off louder and louder echoes. Some mystery here: something hidden beneath the surface of a very ordinary fact.

Last of all the menial herd, Mrs. Mapleton, the hated and untrusted, heard and understood the inner meaning of all this chatter. Carried away with excitement, forgetful of everything,

Mrs. Mapleton came to her mistress late in the evening. Mrs. Mapleton has seen the girl: has heard it from her own lips.

Ellen the maid has named a name. *That* is what all the world is discussing.

'My lady, my lady, don't stop me. It can't be kep' from you—bound to come out . . . oh my lady, Mrs. Garnet has had her say—but didn't *dare*. Now let *me* tell you the truth.'

They were alone at last. Mapleton, burning with excitement, must speak or die.

'For the moment, my lady, I didn't believe it. I says "Oh you wicked girl to say such a thing!" . . . But my lady it's the truth. . . . Oh don't stop me my lady.'

Faster and faster the evil tongue runs on. She is doing her duty. Whatever my lady says now, she will be grateful in the future when she remembers that it was the staunch favourite who, first of them all, loyally opened their eyes.

'His grace, he left May. May, June, July'—and breathlessly Mapleton counts the months. 'My lady it all chimes in—like a Chinese puzzle. The truth, my lady . . . You know what I told you at the time—Well, my lady, I was wrong. Sorry I am to have whispered one word against Miss Shelton and would bite my tongue out sooner than have done it. As innocent she was, my lady . . . and yet my lady, as facts they prove, I was right too—in one way. The truth's come out at last . . .'

Then the woman marshals her ugly facts. My lord's door open; my lord not in his room at night; my lord's valet knowing a good deal more than he cared to chat about. With vile gusto she runs over supporting evidence: gives geographical details—no distance to speak of, short flight of stairs to 'the libery,' those solitary rooms just above the libery. *That* was where my lord was. 'Oh a good-looking 'ussy my lady—playing her cards and carrying of it through under all our eyes. But the truth my lady come out at last,' and with a coarse and yet semi-hysterical chuckle she sums up the situation:

''Is grace has left us a legacy my lady.'

'Be silent.'

'Yes my lady—but I *had* to tell you so as you could know the ground you stood on.'

'Now you may go.'

'Yes, my lady.'

Pain lay in the thought of it. To Lady Colwyn it was a horrible revelation. The trouble rising, forcing an entrance to these stately quiet rooms, was big enough and strong enough now to shake her hand as, in a wavering gesture, she lifted it to her frowning forehead, and with muttering lips told herself that

perhaps after all the thing might not be true. Not true! And yet—

It was strictly in accordance with the ancient traditions of the house that a lord should look with favour on a maid of honour, one of the tiring women—even upon a scullion. Past annals spoke of the very humblest vassal being thus honoured. But all that was a long, a very long, time ago. Lady Colwyn was a hundred years behind her age in so much, but not in this. Pain to heart and pride lay in her thought of it.

Where in the closely-guarded family lore could she find the last record of such a story? She must go back a long way—ninety years—nearly a century. Three generations since my lord in one of his palaces has sought solace in servant's parlour instead of lady's bower! Nothing like *this* since the legend of the housekeeper at the great house in the midlands—and even then, nearly a century ago, it had been felt that my lord was old-fashioned, clashing old customs against new with dangerous violence. It was a legend which one would willingly have pushed backward into earlier days if one could.

And since then—*nothing*: not a scandalous whisper of love below the salt. In this matter we have moved with the changing years. In our latter traditions a certain splendid licence is the attribute of our greatness: the St. Keverne gallantry ranging wide and free, princely follies in youth where the hot blood drives us on to the edge of complete profligacy. But not this—We have kept for a hundred years on our own side of the baize doors.

And yet—Is doubt possible? Can one doubt that the thing is true?

With chin projected and hand to forehead, the old woman mouths and mutters in her big bed in her big room, while the firelight glows on the painted ceiling. One must not judge. He is a man—he is a prince, he is the head of the house: we are only the shaking, heart-sick, old dowager-princess, with red shame, not red firelight, rising to our white hair. One must not judge. But if you had taken a slice of our domain, the half of our lands and churches from the ridge to the sea, and had spared us this humiliation!

Nothing left now in these night hours of the good effect of that ordinance of Dr. James—a little domestic business to attend to. She must not judge. Again and again she mutters the words. He is the head of the house. What does it matter? He is her boy. He is on the west—on the far west, close to the fatal river. Oh what does it matter? What does it matter? Hark! What was that—a far-off chatter of servants at meat?

Shall we let *that* creep into our ears when we lie listening for the thunder of the guns on the west?

Next day there was nothing except a thready and slightly quickened pulse to tell Dr. James that his august patient had passed another sleepless night. Very white and grim seemed Lady Colwyn, enthroned in her big chair, with her palace-physician standing before her to answer questions and receive orders. Lady Colwyn is about to face the trouble and finish with it.

Dr. James has not made a mistake. No, his experience renders the making of a mistake in these circumstances quite impossible. Dr. James sees not the smallest difficulty in planning suitable arrangements; will charge himself with all such arrangements, for which he may add there is no particular hurry; will conduct the journey to the convenient though distant place; will answer for it that no risk attaches to the journey; and so on.

'Good.'

Now Dr. James may withdraw, but of course he must wait. He may be wanted again. Mr. Richards must stand to attention also. Mrs. Garnet is already on duty. Mr. Thompson, the solicitor from the village, may not be wanted, but it is correct of him to be waiting in one of those rooms near the old quadrangle. The whole business must now be gone into, and concluded. The girl—though Lady Colwyn does not make this announcement—must be portioned off: sent not only into well-guarded but into well-paid exile.

Yes, her ladyship will see the girl—for the first time. The girl is now being brought to her.

Outside the room there is mystery, excitement in the air. It is as though the grand scene in some historic drama was approaching. Act four: The Presence Chamber. Courtiers, anxious, watchful, thronging the corridors: Mr. Richards, Mrs. Garnet, the physician; behind them, servants whispering fearfully, white-faced footmen passing as messengers—one lurking with the whitest face of all; and Mapleton the privileged, hated favourite flitting from group to group, entering the Presence Chamber without being summoned, to show her power and state, above all law.

Then, between guards, the girl brought before the throne stands trembling as the keen eyes that she has never once met ere now scrutinise her.

'I am sorry my lady.'

That is all that Ellen has to say. But, questioned, she stands

firm to her tale; cannot be shaken; with downcast eyes names the name. It is the truth, and in this dreadful hour she must confess all the truth.

Let her be removed.

Vivien, hurrying back after dog-exercise, found the unusual company outside the closed doors, glanced from one to another in surprise, and nodded and smiled at her humble friend, Ellen, to whom good Dr. James is whispering. Inside the room her ladyship and Mrs. Mapleton were alone—talking business, it seemed—and Vivien went to one of the windows and looked out at the dripping trees and the wet stone steps. But it is impossible not to hear what they are talking about—a servant dismissed, going this afternoon—Ellen!

'Oh Lady Colwyn—are you dismissing that nice girl? Oh why? What has she done?'

Then abruptly Lady Colwyn tells her why: with a sudden touch of her old-time brutality and coarseness of phrase, lets the lady-in-waiting know all that there is to know. All must know it sooner or later. Let all know it at once—our lady-in-waiting with the rest, and then perhaps she will ask us no more silly questions, will comprehend that after to-day this business goes into our secret legends and that it is our desire to forget it.

'Yes miss,' says the irrepressible Mapleton. 'It 's the truth which has come out at last. We couldn't have kep' it from her ladyship—and now her ladyship has taken her steps it 's to be 'oped we shall be able to stop the talk and keep the worry of it from 'is grace.'

Vivien had turned her back, and was looking out of the window again. A hot knife had stabbed her as she heard the tale of shame, and for a moment she bowed her head beneath the horror of it. Oh, can it be possible? Then in a moment, while the blood still beat at her temples, she came to herself—all her innermost feelings protesting, hurling the thing away—impossible. At the time that he was telling her that *she* had won his love? No. And common sense protested as loudly as intuitive conviction. He had his Mrs. Arncliffe, his Mrs. Granbys—why more? Then, with burning eyes, she turned from the window.

'It is a lie.'

This knight has left his shield—let those who love him keep it bright and clean.

'That this woman should believe it is natural. But that you—*you*, his grandmother—Oh Lady Colwyn how could you—how could you?'

'Bring in the girl.'

And once more the trembling culprit is brought before the throne. Courtiers, servants whisper and wait. The grand scene of the historic drama is developing; fates hang on words now in the presence chamber; emotion is whirling great and small onward to safety or destruction: one pale messenger is creeping further and further into the background.

'Why have you said this?' asks Vivien sternly.

Lady Colwyn, with bent brows and in strange emotion, sits watching her. It would seem almost that our knight has left her on guard. It is as though she was inspired by her high duty. She stands with flashing eyes and white face, rubbing the dulled shield, sweeping off the smirch upon the scutcheon.

'Answer me. Why have you said this?'

'I had to say it. My lady asked to know.'

'She asked to know the truth. Why have you lied to her?'

'I—I have told the truth,' and Ellen began to cry.

'You wretched girl—how dare you? Because the duke is far away, you have dared to attempt this—to make money of your disgrace. You have thought—some one has told you—that money would be given to silence you—to buy your silence. But it shall not. Lady Colwyn will hand you over to justice—to be punished for your base attempt. Do you understand? You will get no money. If you had confessed and asked for mercy, Lady Colwyn would have been kind to you—but now—because of your wicked lie—you have nothing to hope for.'

'Oh, have mercy,' sobbed Ellen and heavily she sank to her knees. 'Oh, my lady, have mercy. He made me do it.'

'Who made you do it?'

'Herbert—miss. He made me say it.'

Then from Lady Colwyn there comes a terrible explosion of wrath which joy in this new truth cannot quell. Her old hands grasping the arms of her chair, have been shaking as though in palsy: and now, red and terrible, she rages. It is as if one heard the cry of one of the dead men behind her, the old fierce lords of the dim past—not in spoken words, but the thought behind the cry: Now strip me these two and tie them face to face, limb to limb as in their wanton sport, and flog them till the red sun goes down behind my battlements. They have taken their duke's name in vain.

'Herbert? Who is Herbert? A footman—from London—not of the land. Fetch him. Bring him. And you—you Mapleton—you, you must believe, must you? By God in heaven you are to come to me with your lies—when you please—You are to watch his grace for me—you—you—'

And then, with recovered breath comes another explosion, in which she tells of the favourite's first accusation against our inspired lady-in-waiting.

'My—my lady,' whimpers Mapleton—'I—I done it for the—'

'This woman must go,' says the lady-in-waiting.

'Yes,' cries Lady Colwyn. 'Yes, she shall go. Do you hear? Take your notice to leave my service in a month.'

'No. Now,' and the lady-in-waiting stamps her foot. 'I cannot sleep under the same roof with her. She or I must go—now.'

In truth the accusation against herself is nothing. It is the attack on him—the absent, that can never be forgiven. She must rub the shield clear of the last bit of dirt.

'Yes, now,' says Lady Colwyn; and a bell is rung; the steward is summoned.

'Richards. This woman is dismissed in disgrace. See that she is paid—and gone from the house within an hour'; and then, turning to the woman: 'Provision will be made for you. Go.'

It is the end of the great scene of the historic drama—the fall of the favourite. Lady Colwyn, white and exhausted, leans back in her chair; the girl, quite forgotten, has gone on sobbing automatically; Mr. Richards is holding the door as the ruined Mapleton creeps away.

The passages are filled with servants: the marvellous news has flown on the wings of hate. The favourite has fallen.

Shrill squeakings of women's voices, bass growling of men's—Mr. Richards, shouting down stone stairs, powerless to keep order. Oh the ready, ready hands to pack up for the snarling old cat! The cat has singed her fur at last. An hour! Within an hour, a clawless cat will be sent scampering.

There are rushes on the stone stairs, wild pressings and pushings in which one might be thrown down and trampled upon, when presently the servants fight for a window to catch a last glimpse of her. 'There she goes. Tally-'o! Woo-oop! worry worry!'

There goes the one-horse brougham—provided by good Mr. Slade—that has been ready and waiting in the old quadrangle for the last thirty minutes. There it goes. The young coachman is making the horse gallop, waving whip fantastically, pantomiming his ecstasy. '—fool!' shouts some one. '—fool! He'll upset the damn thing and we'll have her back with a broken leg.'

But no such disaster happens. The old cat is gone.

One of the servants seemed to have hurried away as though anxious to escort the departing Mapleton on her journey. Herbert, the pallid Londoner, was not to be found when people looked for him. He had used his long legs, in a swift, though unobtrusive, retreat across the wet parklands, and had vanished through one of the swing gates in the park wall.

The girl was going: not quite in despair. Dr. James and Mr. Richards would see that she had benefit of palace-law. They would carry out her ladyship's instructions: perhaps with some slight modifications, but they would not inquire if recent orders had been reconsidered and cancelled. This was the proper course to pursue: what her ladyship would wish to have happened if she ever spoke of the matter again.

Seen by Vivien, the girl was very contrite and very grateful for any kind words one could give her.

'Oh miss, if you knew all I 've been through. I told you I 'd a mind to throw myself in the water.'

She implored Vivien to see the man, to speak for her, remind him what his duty was, and compel him to do it. If Miss Shelton would but speak the word, the man would marry her.

'That 's what I want miss. I do want that, and nothing else in the world.'

'He is a great scoundrel if he does not do it.'

'He 's not that, miss—but he wants to be spoken to and then he 'll do it. And miss, I *am* sorry. I can't say more.'

Thus it happened that when, after the poor girl had gone, a note was brought back by the carriage, Vivien felt bound to accept the invitation contained. Would she please, said Ellen, visit the humble public-house where *he* was hiding, and not tell anybody of the visit.

It was a most unpleasant ordeal—this interview by candle-light in the stuffy little sitting-room of the Stag's Head.

Herbert, standing tall and upright, with folded hands, wore his mask of servitude. He was still the footman who had carried the silver dishes for her—now bringing his heels together and waiting to be lectured. You might say anything you liked: and he would not answer you back. He was, when you made him speak, entirely respectful and entirely shameless.

'On *one* condition,' said Herbert. 'That you promise me your protection, miss.'

'You mean, you want me to influence her ladyship?'

'No. Never mind her ladyship. I want *your* promise, miss.'

'I would always help your wife if I could, but it would not be in my power—'

'That's *my* risk,' said Herbert. '*If* you 'ave it in your po'r, you 'll never let me want. I 'm satisfied with that, miss. That 's all right. I 'll make an honest woman of her.'

'Will you make her a good husband?'

'I will, miss, so 'elp me Gawd,' and for a moment the mask dropped and the man appeared. 'Miss, I love that girl. It was but a try-on. I 'd 'ave stood by her all right—and married her in a year or two, when I felt my feet under me. But I 'll do it now.'

Herbert left with one a peculiar impression—a man utterly devoid of scruples, but possessed of great reserved force and of insatiable ambition—one who meant to go far. In a flash he had shown himself; then, lifting the footman's mask, he stood by the open door a pallid meaningless form again.

Lady Colwyn alone in her room had been slowly recovering self-composure.

In her satisfaction that the trouble had passed away from her, she was conscious of an immense relief and an immense weariness. As she thought of all that had happened, she felt as one humiliated and yet delighted.

How poor a figure she had cut before this shop-girl. She, the great lady. She, his grandmother had believed—had accepted the mud flung in her face. No instinct, no pride of race had saved her from outrage. But the girl had smashed it all down with a splendid word. Only a pause for thought,—'*This is a lie.*'

Then when she demanded punishment—prompt as lightning: demanding it as a right before she the ruler could mete it out, almost before she could formulate the thought of it! No delay: stamping her foot—cold and remorseless and grand—this nobody teaching her. She is captivated, but humiliated. How poor a figure she had cut. Your notice—a month's warning—base thought—like a tradesman's wife; but this girl would have none of it.

'*Now!*'

It had acted as a spur—a clarion note; and she had comported herself properly for the rest of the scene—recalled to propriety by this shop-waif.

Who were these Sheltons? Where did she get it from? It shattered her theories, left her troubled and wandering. Was

there nothing in it—the glorious current, the blood-stream that must flow on through the centuries? A chimera, an empty dream? Could it all be taught, be learnt out of books, as the Radicals pretended? Or had she by some unknown descent derived the divine fire—was she not by some unrecognised path a wanderer from the elect? For the sake of one's theories, one would like to think so.

XLIII

THE cruel lesson of the war was proceeding. The darkest hours had come and gone. That never-to-be-forgotten week was over. England was awake—at last.

Lady Colwyn's face had in the week become very grey. At one time Dr. James did not like the colour. She was looking older and older and older. She would have no newspaper read aloud to her: she must read everything to herself—very slowly. And as she read she used to lift her disengaged hand to her forehead.

'Guns lost. Ah! Well—They must be recovered. . . . Guns lost. Ah! . . . Guns! . . . Ah!'

And each time that she said 'Ah,' she brought her trembling hand to her forehead.

The illustrated journals almost drove her crazy, and yet one could not keep them from her. Here were the hideous, monstrous facts hastily dressed out in a story without words: 'surprises' as imagined by clever artists and swiftly presented in bold brushwork; the endless files of prisoners streaming away in painstaking pen and ink; photograph albums filled with the portraits of the slain.

Vivien studied them all—with shuddering horror: page after page of the frank, fearless, unthinking dead faces. Boys and old men on the peasants' side; boys and old men on ours. Photographs 'procured through the courtesy' of sorrowing widows, mothers, fathers—the picture of our beloved son that we have courteously extracted from the frame in our own room and send you as requested, to take its place on the death-roll of this unhappy surprise. Vivien looked at the smiling dead faces with ever increasing horror. 'Greening' a month ago—'Sold' for the last time.

'I—I cannot speak of it,' said Lady Colwyn. 'I think we —must—wait. I think—we should—wait—and pray.'

'Visibly shaken,' said Dr. James to the lady-in-waiting. 'But on the whole no more so than one might have expected. The worst is over—we should do very well now. Yes, I believe we shall be all right now. The point to keep before her is that

his grace has passed through the danger. There he is, fit and well—the danger past. We are not likely to have this sort of thing again. In conversation I have been dwelling on that point—bringing her back to it. If I were you, Miss Shelton, I should always keep that before her.'

'But Dr. James, is it true? Will he not be in danger again and again?'

Dr. James shrugged his shoulders.

'We must hope for the best. I do really think the worst is over.'

'Oh Dr. James, if anything dreadful happened to him!'

'Ah yes,' and Dr. James became grave. 'That would be serious at her great age. If *that* happened, Miss Shelton, you would be quite right to be alarmed for her—quite right, I fear.'

In these short December days Dr. James desired to watch his august patient as closely as might be possible, and yet not prove himself troublesome to the patient. He would wait for hours in the library now, because it was nearer than the old parlour. In the library, or walking to and fro in the corridor, he told Vivien more and more of his thoughts.

'There are no head symptoms. Well, of course that is what I have really been looking out for. The strain *must* be very great, mustn't it. Doubtless much—on the emotional side, as one may call it—is, so to speak, dead: atrophied. But, Miss Shelton, she is immensely fond of the duke—great depth of feeling—real love. Now you have only to put yourself in her place to realise the strain.'

Miss Shelton had no difficulty in putting herself in Lady Colwyn's place. Naturally, there must be great strain.

'What I should really *like*,' said Dr. James, 'would be to get down Sir William Baxter—only to have a look at her. But I don't quite see how we could manage that.'

'If you think it advisable—'

'No. I should like it—really selfishly—just for my own comfort. Not in the least necessary. Unless, by any chance, head symptoms were discernible—*then*, of course.'

On another occasion Dr. James inquired again if Miss Shelton had been reading the court news.

'Miss Shelton, do you remember what I told you? You know what I threw out about Sir William Baxter? Ah, you ought to read the court news. Intensely interesting, if you can read between the lines.'

It seemed that Dr. James was compelled to think in these dark days of that other aged lady suffering in *her* castle.

'You know,' said Dr. James, after he had seen Lady Colwyn. 'We really have got through it remarkably well. You know, Miss Shelton, you have to consider shock as well as strain. Late in life a sudden reversal of long settled notions—a general upheaval of the old order of things is really no trifling matter.'

'I don't quite understand you.'

'I mean this war—this war itself. Leaving his grace entirely out of consideration—here is violent shock. I assure you, Miss Shelton, *I* feel it. I honestly believe everybody over fifty *must* feel it. I am over sixty and it has shaken *me*. You are too young to feel it—you can't understand. But to us old fogeys it is like the world tumbling to pieces—all you have leaned on going—weakness where you thought there was strength—strength where you looked for weakness. You don't understand.'

'Yes I do. It is just what I feel.'

'You do? You feel it too? Like the opening of a new era, isn't it? Well think what that must mean to *her*—at her advanced age—a great lady, who by the greatness of her position and so forth has been able to keep change of all sorts at arm's length—to refuse, if she chose, to recognise that the world was moving. Think what the shock must be—quite apart from the strain.'

Vivien thought that she could understand. The shock must be very great.

The odd fancy came to her that in this respect Lady Colwyn was like one of the grand old robber-towers thinking itself impregnable perched on its little hill, and left tottering after the first discharge of modern artillery.

'Good morning, Miss Shelton . . . Oh by the way. I don't think much of that woman she has with her—the new one—What's her name—Hibbert. I really think Hibbert is a fool. She can tell me nothing.'

This Hibbert, the new comer, was indeed a very foolish person. After the fall of Mapleton, Lady Colwyn's principal maid had been promoted to the post of waiting-woman—an office now shorn of nearly all its old importance, to carry with it henceforth neither patronage nor privileges; and the stranger had come with a fabulously good character to fill the maid's place. Certainly she understood a maid's duties; she had been in the highest situations for fifteen years; but from the first Lady Colwyn inspired her with an awe that rendered her impotent and awkward. She had been long accustomed to great ladies, but the lady of Hawkridge was too much for her nerves.

Now, this Hibbert was responsible for the false alarm of head symptoms.

Scared out of her wits, she came tearing along the corridor one evening, and sobbed and raved to Vivien. Her ladyship had just dined, and after dinner Hibbert had been in the room.

'She says "Be silent." Miss, I never spoke. "Be silent," she says again, and sits looking at me through and through as if she saw people standing behind me. Oh I can't stop—I won't stop—not if I was paid twice the money,' and the foolish crying woman looked back down the corridor, as though she expected to see her terrifying mistress coming to terrify her once more.

'"Be you silent," she says, nodding her head. "My lady," I says, "I never said a word." And she lifts her hand and says, "Listen! *I can hear the lost guns firing.*" Miss, there wasn't a sound. Miss, she isn't right. I can't stop—I won't stop—not if you paid me any money.'

After this Dr. James thought the presence of Sir William was distinctly indicated as desirable.

'Just for half an hour, Miss Shelton, without in any way disturbing her. I must honestly own that it would make *me* more comfortable. I have been speaking to Mr. Wright and Mr. Richards, and they tell me that there will not be the smallest difficulty as to the fee. The name can just be entered as though a tradesman. Mr. Richards tells me that since October she has passed the accounts without once looking into them. No questions asked.'

In this manner the little informal visit was arranged. It was said that the well-known Sir William Baxter was honouring his country colleague by spending a night beneath his humble roof. Might Dr. James ask a favour? Might he bring his distinguished guest to the great house to see the Vandykes and the Rembrandts? This grace was at once accorded, and then Dr. James, expatiating on the fame of his guest, advanced a step. Sir William was at the very top of his profession—'quite one of our biggest men'; he was admitted to the friendship of some of the highest in the land—received 'as an invited guest' in the greatest houses in London: undoubtedly an interesting man who knew much of the state of affairs out there: full of news probably of South Africa. Well then—Dr. James knew this was no light thing to ask—could and would Lady Colwyn condescend to see Sir William after he had looked at the pictures? Sir William would be gratified; Dr. James would be intensely gratified; Lady Colwyn would be conferring a compliment upon the profession generally.

'Oh yes,' said Lady Colwyn, looking into the fire, 'I am quite willing to see—your friend.'

Thus cleverly did Dr. James contrive the interview.

The famous Sir William came and went. He admired the pictures; was ushered into the presence; and remained with her ladyship for thirty-seven minutes. Dr. James, sitting on the edge of his chair, listened and admired. Here was the splendid palace-manner, recognised by Lady Colwyn in a moment, making her graciously conversational, interested, not in the least bored. She was talking of the pictures: giving the visitor dates, history, anecdote. Marvellous! The visitor is testing her memory. She was talking of an illustrious personage, and the visitor has made a blunder as to a name and has been corrected. Apropos! He is showing her a gold seal taken from his watch-chain—a gift from the son of that very prince. Ah! He has let it fall upon the floor. He is testing her nerves. Dr. James can scarcely contain his admiration, is in danger of coming off the edge of his chair, as the great man holds the seal again for her to see the coat-of-arms—moving it to and fro, placing it in the best light for her. He is testing the pupils of her eyes—dilatation, contraction. When the visitor returns to his chair nearly all his work is done.

He talks to her about South Africa—but *how* he talks!

It is as though plainly, before his eyes, Dr. James was seeing the marvellous medicine administered: sedative first, then tonic. We are about to have a very quiet time out there it seems: a period of reorganisation and silent preparation. We shall not have any more of the old trouble. Oh no, *that* ugly dream is over. Work before us still: but plain work, and it will be done very completely.

And before his admiring eyes, Dr. James sees the effect of the medicine upon the patient. Something of the sort he has essayed with his rustic hand and simple herbs—but oh how utterly he has failed! The patient is responding now. It is glorious white magic.

'The right man, Lady Colwyn; and the right man under him!'

'You think so?' and her hand shakes.

'I am sure of it. The destinies of the Empire are in hands that will not fail!'

'I pray not.'

Thirty-five minutes gone—a last dose!

This is something that Sir William could not speak of to any one, perhaps, but Lady Colwyn. Yesterday he has been to those stone towers above the peaceful Thames; and there he

has heard things and seen things—and he glances round as though he wishes that poor Dr. James was outside in the corridor. He has seen the grief-stricken hero—the old servant who has come there to tell his mistress that the task which has been laid upon him is not beyond his powers. He will carry it through. Sir William has seen—in the towers by the restful Thames—great courage, as always, but also a splendid new confidence. The worst is over.

'Good-bye Lady Colwyn.'

'Grand,' says Sir William outside in the corridor, 'very grand. Most impressive—and not a sign—not the faintest sign of anything to cause alarm.'

In the old library he says it again to Miss Shelton.

'Grand—very grand,' exactly as though he had just been shown a cathedral, as well as some pictures and an old woman. 'I have been immensely impressed. But my coming was quite unnecessary. However, it was very natural that my friend here should wish me to come. Except for the *unforeseen*, you need have no fear.'

It was after this visit that Lady Colwyn surprised Vivien by an invitation to dine with her to-night and on succeeding nights.

'It has occurred to me that you may be lonely—and you are not fond of long dinners, are you? Very well. I will tell them.'

Vivien said that she liked very short dinners and she would like very much to dine with Lady Colwyn, but she feared that her company might be troublesome to Lady Colwyn.

'No—I would—like—your—company.' Lady Colwyn was looking into the fire again, and she spoke in an extraordinarily low voice—dropping it to quite a whisper, with pauses between the words as though she was listening while she spoke. 'I would like—your company. But don't—talk to me. Don't try—to—make me talk.'

Henceforth they dined together in the room next that in which Lady Colwyn spent her days. For Vivien there were always dainty dishes—not the formal menu of the room downstairs, but a good and sufficient meal; and for Lady Colwyn there was a little bowl of soup, or some fish, with a tiny milk pudding. Vivien was careful not to talk unless talked to, and sometimes the silence during the repast was only disturbed by the crackling of the dry toast as Lady Colwyn snapped it into fragments on a silver plate.

On the first night of the new arrangement when, after they

had returned to the other room, Lady Colwyn broke a very long silence, she gave, as Vivien thought, a splendid example of the grandeur that had impressed Sir William.

'Miss Shelton. Don't let Dr. James worry me. I am all right.'

She had known why the visitor had come. She did not say it now in words—it went without saying. You should not assume that it is easy to deceive a great lady seated on her throne in the midst of her own realm. She had known and affected not to know: because there was nothing wrong in what her subjects were doing. They meant well; and indeed she had derived benefit from their kind, loyal thought.

'I am all right. If by a wish I could take him from the war I would not wish.'

She was speaking in a voice that Vivien had never heard before. It was that gentle voice that she used only when she and her grandson were alone together.

'If with a word I could have my boy here—' and she looked towards the hearth where he used to stand—'I would not say the word. . . . It is impossible for a person in the position of Dr. James to understand. But *you* understand, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'I would not do it. I am all right—only anxious. A little anxious. But we women must wait and pray.'

That was what ladies must do in their castles while the knights are riding far away: wait and pray.

On Sunday for the first time Vivien heard the prayers. They did not go to the church to sit under the vicar and be stared at by the vicar's wife, but had a short amateur service, with no congregation, in Lady Colwyn's room. Vivien officiated: reading aloud, as directed, a lesson from the Old Testament, three or four Psalms, and several collects. Lady Colwyn in arranging her service paid not the smallest attention to the order for the day. It was a special service by special command.

Then she prayed.

Servants had placed cushions, and kneeling on the cushions she leaned her arms on the seat of her chair, clasped her old hands, and uttered her petitions in a loud whisper.

'Lord have mercy on him'—it was a wonderful litany—'Lord have mercy on my boy. Christ have pity on my poor lamb. Deliver him, O my God, out of the assaults of our enemies. Spare him O God. Give him strength in this good cause O Lord. Make of him Thy instrument of just wrath to

chastise our enemies, but guard and save his life. Spare him O Lord God,' etc.

It was wonderful to hear—the fervour of the groaning voice: the agonised cry from the still living heart.

How different now from the pompous prayers of old. Not a trace left of the stately forms: as of potentate to potentate. Not Lady Colwyn of Hawkridge presenting her compliments and requesting attention to certain long outstanding matters of business, but a humble suppliant with bowed head before the Throne of Grace.

Thus, very slowly, the week had gone since the last and most crushing disaster, and it was the shortest day of all the year—Vivien's birthday.

On this day came the first of the duke's letters—three letters written at different times and places but reaching home all together. All through the brief daylight his granny read them again and again. A sentence here and a sentence there she recited to her silent lady-in-waiting, and when twilight fell that lady had been permitted to learn nearly all that the letters held.

They were soldier's letters. He begged granny to wait contentedly. 'Yes. That is what I have said. Wait,' said granny. She might be sure, he said, that they were all doing their best; but they were a little new to the work, and accidents could not be prevented in the best-regulated families. He spoke of these peasants with soldier-like generosity. They were capital fellows—game as badgers, and rather like them in their ways: you wanted a lot of care in routing them out. Up to now they had not caught many of them, but the few he had seen he thought were ever so much better chaps than you could have expected.

One letter had been written by the camp fire. One letter, in pencil, had been written by moonlight. There were no artificial lights in camp that night, and he described how four warriors had dug a trench to put their legs in while, on the ground they had left untouched in the middle of the trench, they played bridge by the light of the moon. All three were soldier's letters.

In the twilight, granny of a sudden began to talk of birthdays. When one was young, birthdays were important; when old, one often wished to forget them. In the present circumstances, it was not right to pass it over. Something should have been done to mark the day—the birthday should not be forgotten.

Vivien was startled by the unexpected words.

'Oh Lady Colwyn, you are very kind—most kind. But *how* did you know?'

'How do I know? What do you mean?'

'What—what were you speaking of?'

'I am speaking of the duke's birthday.'

'When is the duke's birthday?'

'It was yesterday.'

And Lady Colwyn said that of course she had not forgotten the anniversary. She had written her birthday letter long ago, and she hoped he had it by now; but something should have been done here. Mr. Frensham should have looked to that. A new flag to be run up—something! 'And I think Mr. Roberts should have had the bells rung. Perhaps they were rung. I did not hear them.'

In this twilight hour it was Vivien's custom now to go for a little while to the library. Mr. Frensham somewhere behind the books was sleeping, writing up the catalogue, or thinking about tea: the room was always empty at this hour. In the falling dusk the picture seemed almost to come to life: the eyes, gazing out of the gloom, never left one's face; and, as the shadows came creeping, the lips seemed to move, and the last thing one saw was a smile.

But this afternoon she turned on the electric light. For the first time in her life she was longing to read the book dear to papa. She must see this marvellous fact on a printed page. Wonderful! It was true. 'Born on the twentieth of December.' She could not read of his honours and magnificence—pages and pages in this year's book. What space would the new book need to tell of his state? She only wanted to be quite certain of the wonderful fact and then go on thinking about it.

She had known that they had been born in the same year, but not, not *this*. It was as though fate had busied itself with their two lives. No, not fate. It was as though the fairies had been busy—as though the fairies had tried, and only just failed, to get them born within the same hour: because the fairies knew that all her life she would think of him, and that once for a little, for a very little while, he would think of her.

Then she turned out the light, and sat waiting in the dusk for the smile.

XLIV

THE drab curtain had fallen. That was all one knew. Throughout this first month of the year not a sound was heard from the far west. It was said that at the base, short work was being made with all the ladies. From the social point of view, the Cape Town season had been a failure; there had been much scandal, bickering, and painful excitement, but the dancing men had all been too busy at the front to attend to any except military duties; so now most of the pretty amateurs were willing to be sent home.

Lady Augusta was returning in great distress of mind. She was in fear now for Johnny and sincerely wished to stay out there; but Johnny—and others more powerful than Johnny—had asked her to go home, and she was simply obeying orders. In a long letter she told Vivien about the new order of things, as well as of the scandal and squabbles.

'You may be sure,' said Lady Augusta, 'that Mrs. Arncliffe couldn't be anywhere without being *talked* about, but here she has really surpassed herself. First it was Claudie Stanford with whom she came out and they said she went trekking with him and a lot of rough-riders and dressed herself like a *vivandière* and tried hard to get captured because she had some idea she would find out the enemy's plans and escape and tell them and be the heroine of the war—Joan of Arc you know.

'I don't know,' wrote Lady Augusta, 'if all that is true or just lies it is what they *said*. But she came down again to meet your Duke of M. and she hunted him all round Cape Town. It is absolutely over between them. I never would have believed it. I rather wonder *why*. But she would not admit it. Now *this* is really true. She followed your duke and forced her way up as far as the Modder camp. She *is* undefeated. They sent her down under a guard, but somehow she picked up poor little Lord Ha·bury badly wounded and brought him back as a prize. She said she had rescued him from the R.A.M.C. and would not let him go and *that* has been the *great* scandal. They say she has been ordered to leave South Africa seven times but she goes on to the hospital ship and just laughs at them.

'Now I will tell you something more about your duke. They say he has twice done something that deserved the Victoria Cross. But because he is a duke he will not get it. People would only say it was *because* he was a duke and he does not want it. Johnny says he is splendid, and I know very well my Johnny is splendid too. And they say Claudie Stanford has done something very big but I don't know what. I dare say you know. Out here we know simply nothing of what is going on because of the censorship.'

That was the only letter that came to the great house from South Africa during the long month of January.

Of other letters that Vivien received, two were very pleasant. One was from Marian, repeating her tale of happiness, and with many 'Oh Vi's,' hinting at a prospect of still further joy that might be coming to the sunlit island home. Then in a letter from kind Mrs. Gardiner there was good news about 'your little friend Miss Gregory.' Mrs. Gardiner had long since given the Skeleton in the Cupboard the chance spoken of by the doctors. The poor white slave of Pring's was doing extraordinarily well under the open-air cure at Shanklin; and Mrs. Gardiner had turned on a golden tap of one of her many charitable machines, so that the parents were better supplied now than when their small breadwinner was still in the cash-desk. 'She can never be strong again,' said Mrs. Gardiner, 'but the mischief has been arrested. We shall be able to find some wholesome work for her later on. She is very anxious to get back to work.'

This was good news to think of by well-sustained effort as one drove on the long round with one's silent employer. Indeed all letters now were welcome to employer and employed. Dr. James was not as great as Sir William, but he had correctly understood the necessity to mental health of sufficient mental food.

Quite at the end of the month two thought-producing letters came to Vivien in a single packet. One was a very sad letter: the other was a very surprising letter. The sad letter was from the author of *Where Life flows Deep*. Maud Hopkins told her dearest Vi that she was sorry she had been so bad a correspondent of late, because now she thought there would be no opportunity of making up for past neglect. Looking at the changed handwriting Vivien understood. The feebly pencilled words of the once rapid word-spinner ran downward to the end of each short line. 'So now,'—and one could read all the effort of the failing hand—'if you do not hear from me again, this must be Good-bye.'

It was a long time before she read the other—the surprising letter.

Some stranger, apparently, addressing the envelope to Miss Vi Shelton, c/o Miss Hopkins, c/o the London publishers, had written to her from China. Some one in Manchuria who called her 'My dear Vi!' Not a stranger then!

'I have just read the book so many thousands of miles away and I am sure it is you. What an immense time, my dear Vi, since you and I met. Not since those happy days when you and I were children, but I have not forgotten you. We were like little sweethearts, weren't we? And I have always thought with affection of my little nursery comrade, and I hope you have thought thus now and then of me.'

Who in the name of wonder could it be? 'Your affectionate cousin Lawrence Burnett.' Out of the dim past, out of the mists of time, across limitless space, the strange voice of her crab-cousin speaking to her! She laid down the letter and shivered.

So deep a brain-track had the old impression made that now, after nearly two decades, the brain cells did the old work the moment they received the stimulus of memory. The nerve-currents flashed inward, then outward, bridging, leaping, till the strong sense-message returned and her flesh crept as she thought of the little boy's awful 'pince.'

But *he* had forgotten it. He looked back through the years at dream-pictures, not at facts, and he wrote with an exile's tenderness and an exile's yearning regard for all that belonged to home. Distance and time for him had thrown a glamour over those early days, and he really thought that he and his once-seen cousin had been superlatively joyful playmates.

He had knocked about the world doing no good, he said, until he was summoned for the work in the country of the Manchus. He was in Adelaide when the call came. He had found salvation at Colombo twelve months previously, but had waited until his Master found work for him. Now for three years he had been doing the work—with others—as a Christian missionary. It had been easy at first, but now it was becoming difficult. Had she read anything of the Boxer movement?

A missionary! Wonderful! Fate had sent him to a land where men were as cruel as crabs. He was walking in the valley of the shadow of death, and he gloried in the thought of it. The work to-day. Torture and the cross to-morrow? But quite shyly he asked his cousin to write to him and say if she also had found salvation. 'I hope you have, but I must not preach to you, must I? Please tell your clever friend how much I admire parts of her book. As you are a great literary critic I ought not to express an opinion. I think the vision of

our Master *very* daring though *perhaps* justified, but there are things in it she would never have published if our Master had been always in her thoughts. Do write soon to your affectionate cousin Lawrence Burnett.'

She wrote very soon. It would have seemed wicked not to reply at once to the strange far-off voice. But it was a very difficult letter to write.

Half of February was gone and the song of the birds was in the air; hope was in the air—the eagle was in the air. Then the eagle swooped.

On the west came the galloping horsemen in their splendid sweeping ride. Five thousand riders silently gathered, silently launched—sweeping wide, riding strong, and the first of the leaguered towns is free. And the duke was in the glorious ride, and Lord Rotherfield, and Sir John Hartnell, and Major Claude Stanford—all the knights, good and bad, that one had ever heard of. Home on the flashing wires came the sound of the beating hoofs, to mix with the sound of the beating hearts.

It made you laugh and cry as you read of it. The ugly dream was over. The magician had waved his sword—waved his wand: had turned the dreaded enemy into a flock of brown sheep and was driving them before him across the dusty plain.

'Yes—I—told you—to wait—Yes, Ha Ha,' and Lady Colwyn laughed and wept. 'Patience, my girl—One—must be patient.'

Higher and higher she sat in her big chair. The magician had changed her too: waved the wand above the bowed head, tipped the burden of care from the bent shoulders, brought the good blood back to the shrunk veins—turned the silent sufferer into a rather arrogant old dame once more.

She was ten years younger after the great surrender at Paardeberg. All the world could see the years slipping from her proud face.

'How many? Read it out, my girl; don't mumble. . . . Good. A balance struck! Now we are seeing.'

There were long telegrams coming to her from a press agency, as well as short telegrams now and then from Pall Mall. Long and short they must be copied, in those rooms behind the cloister, quick as life. Then my lady, driving out in the pleasant sunlight, among the twittering, whistling birds, must give the copies with her own hand to the postmasters of Hawkridge, of Tellhurst, of Parracote, etc., to be proudly stuck to the glass of post office windows. The news was already in the papers

perhaps: in doorways and on steps, perhaps her villagers were now reading it. No matter! This is word for word what we have received at the great house. You comprehend the meaning of the shorter message? It means that the duke is advancing upon Bloemfontein. Drive on.

Higher and higher she carried her old head as the good weeks followed each other in the glad spring weather. While the victorious army swept on—resistance brushed aside, all danger gone, a royal progress—it was curious to observe how power in hand and eye and voice was returning to her.

'Yes,' and she sat chuckling, crowing, after the annexation of the new colony. 'Yes, my man. Tit for tat,' and she chuckled as she thus addressed an unseen president. 'You were in too much of a hurry. I think you should have waited.'

But it was most curious to see how, with other powers, the power of anger had returned. The subdued, silent Lady Colwyn who since the ninth of December had never raised her voice in wrath could, and did, now sometimes answer with a flash and a roar. She must not be contradicted; there must be no argument. Even a thoughtless word, spoken or printed, could now produce a short outbreak of violent, almost incoherent rage.

Thus it was when Vivien made reply to the old lady's grim lament that the driven foe were not undergoing all the punishment one had desired.

'So few killed. So few of them killed.'

And Vivien had said that, terrible as it seemed, she supposed that a little slaughter now might save much slaughter later on. If they suffered at once, their suffering would be brief. 'In the end it might be more merciful.'

'To the devil with your merciful,' shrieked the old dame. 'And you call yourself a soldier's daughter. Merciful! Who were you—you Sheltons? Who was your mother? Not much account—I think—if you talk like that.'

'Don't. Oh please don't.'

'Then be you silent too. Don't talk to me like a—like a radical newspaper,' and the angry tones subsided.

Some hours later her ladyship expressed regret for this particular outburst.

'Miss Shelton.'

'Yes.'

'Don't mind what I say. Never mind what I say. I am sorry that I spoke unkindly. My words had no meaning.'

They were sitting side by side in the swiftly rolling carriage and Lady Colwyn said no more for a minute or two.

'Miss Shelton, I am sure that your mother must have been very nice—very nice indeed. She died when you were quite young, didn't she?'

'Yes.'

'That was very sad.'

Then her ladyship asked many questions—graciously and kindly—but in fact and substance they were only a translation of that old question which she had asked so rudely:—Who were you Sheltons?

'Your father has often talked to you of his family? People are naturally proud of their family.'

'Yes, I think my father was proud of his.'

'It is a very proper pride,' said Lady Colwyn. 'And your mamma—was she also—proud?'

'Oh no.'

'Ah!' said Lady Colwyn, as though she was sorry to hear it. A bad sign. 'But your father was. He often talked to you about it. What did he tell you?'

'Oh, I don't know. We were poor—I think that was the reason why—why he was interested'—papa's pride was a painful subject—'I mean I think he was afraid that because we were poor, people might want to be rude to us—so he only told me things to give me courage.'

'Quite so. What sort of things did he tell you?'

Vivien smiled.

'He used to tell me to remember that I was the equal by birth of anybody in England—on both sides. My mother's and his.'

'Oh.'

It was impossible not to take a momentary and mischievous amusement in the effect produced by this statement. Lady Colwyn was looking straight before her at the glittering buttons on Mr. Slade's back.

'I did not believe it, Lady Colwyn. I understood it to be only a way of speaking.'

'It was certainly a very large way of speaking,' said Lady Colwyn becoming gracious again. 'But your father wished to give you courage. Quite so. On both sides? Then used he to speak of your mamma's family also?'

Vivien's thoughts had drifted away to long past sadness. She was thinking of that amazing speech of papa's: 'In *one* thing I wronged your poor mother . . . I never guessed that she was of a good descent'; of the Carter legacy—and the annuity; of the Carter papers that the solicitors held from papa as a hint that there was a bill which had not been paid; of the big, care-

fully sealed packet—that contained nothing but 'sentimental interest I fear, Miss Shelton,'—handed to her so gravely by the head of the firm in exchange for her formal receipt, and once bestowed, while tears were falling, at the bottom of her old trunk. It lay now in a drawer in her room with seals unbroken still. If melted wax and twisted tape could confine all dead unhappy memories!

'You do not answer me.'

'Oh Lady Colwyn, I beg your pardon. I believe I have all the history of my mother's family at home—at Hawkridge.'

Then, when she had been made to explain what she meant, she was reproved by Lady Colwyn for neglect of family records.

'You should go through everything most carefully. Put all in order. It is a duty. Such records should never be neglected. I would like to see them myself.'

That afternoon a letter from the duke was waiting for Lady Colwyn.

She read it at once—while Vivien remained in attendance—slowly and studiously, to the end, without reciting a single passage—a single word. Then, after tea, she read it again, and the lady-in-waiting fidgeted about the room; came near to the armchair; and, kneeling, put a small log upon the fire. 'Thank you,' said Lady Colwyn without looking up—and without reciting. Not till the third reading did she begin to recite.

'"I hope all the good news has cheered you up. You had to wait for it—" There. That is what I told you from the very first. "I hope you are not tiring yourself with your long drives." . . . My boy is always so considerate. Listen to this.'

And then came a dazzling passage.

His grace wished that granny had thought of sending to London for the world-famous veterinary surgeon. Of course the local vet was useless. 'But all is well that ends well. I am very glad indeed to hear that the dog is really all right again.'

'Then did you tell him about my dog?'

'Yes,' said Lady Colwyn somewhat shamefacedly, 'I did. It is not easy to know what to tell him. But—in fact—I try to tell him *everything*.'

Then the lady-in-waiting went off duty, to think about it.

He had written it amidst danger and death. In the face of the enemy, lying down at night on the ground that he had won, or riding onward to the fight, he had been able to feel pity for a poor little dog.

In the course of this evening Lady Colwyn returned again to the subject of family records.

'They are very interesting. There are numbers of volumes in the library here—of the greatest interest. I would like to see those papers of yours. I should be glad to assist you in setting them in order—or to supervise Mr. Frensham in assisting you.'

Vivien thanked Lady Colwyn. She would produce the papers.

'Yes. But not now. Some time later—when I have nothing else to think of. Then it would interest me—it would interest me very much.'

Again Vivien thanked Lady Colwyn. She would keep her papers until they were wanted.

'And Miss Shelton. Do not mind anything I say. If I ever speak angrily—do not mind. Do not shun me because I have seemed unkind. I like your company. But I am still—a little anxious.'

XLV

SLOWLY the weeks passed away, slowly the furrows deepened on Lady Colwyn's face. Her eyes still flashed each time that she read of the magic wand doing its work, but then at once she began again to brood, to sink lower in the big chair, to look very, very old. Dr. James, watching, could but record the effects of strain—prolonged strain, and repeated shock.

The duke was down with fever—not enteric, it was hoped. He had been ill many days before the news came. He had dropped out of his place somewhere on the march to Pretoria: had been left where he lay, in one of the newly occupied towns, too ill to be moved. This was severe strain for a fortnight. At the end of a fortnight came shock—but only the shock of good news. The duke was up again; had overtaken the army at Pretoria; was well enough to return to the situation appropriate to a St. Keverne—the forefront of the battle.

Then came shock again. The duke had been hit by a fragment of shell in the fighting to the east of Pretoria.

And now it seemed that strain must soon be over. With the fall of the second capital, the war—the great war—must surely be considered at an end. When his grace is able to leave the hospital at Pretoria he may surely now come home. Not before have we dared to wish it—but now. He has done all that it behoves a duke or leader of men to do. He has fulfilled the high duty of the head of his house; he has fought until victory has been assumed. The great task is accomplished: our resolute enemy are scattered, melted away—turned again from driven sheep into mountain goats. What goat-herding still remains can be done by quite ordinary goat-herds.

More useful now in the senate than the camp, thinks Mr. Frensham. 'Should come home now, miss. Done grandly—as we knew he would—but, Miss Shelton, he *ought* to come home now,' and then Mr. Frensham, with sudden change of manner, sent forth a cold vibrating wave of panic fear to spread through the quiet atmosphere of the old library.

'Miss Shelton, I don't like the way things are going out there.'

'Oh what do you mean?'

'Dangerous work coming—hunting down—not war. Shot as you ride—by men hidden behind rocks—in caves. I don't like to think of it. Dangerous work—dirty work. Not work for him.'

But the duke was not coming home. It was a terrible disappointment to his brooding granny. The servants of the great house ceased chattering and laughing. They had all thought their duke was coming home. And again and again the old librarian repeated his chilling words. He was preternaturally busy, cataloguing all day long: fussy, haggard, restless, never getting more forward with his self-imposed tasks, though working sometimes through the short nights as well as the long days. He had banished all sense of calm from this silent room; had filled it with nerve-disturbing, rapidly-vibrating waves.

'I don't like the way things are going. He ought to have come home. I don't like even to think of it.'

Dread rode by the carriage-wheels, and Horror came riding behind them, nearer and nearer.

In the glorious summer weather it seemed to Vivien that Nature herself, mocking at the radiant peace of these late June days, was speaking her old abominable message far and near. Carnage and still more carnage—the remorseless work of destruction, out there on the battle-field, here in smiling England: far and near. So many to be destroyed, so few to be saved, by Nature's inexorable law.

Out there the death-roll was mounting, ever mounting. Victory or defeat—what difference did it make? War or peace—what difference did it make? Nature herself, not puny man, had made the atrocious law, and with smiling face was enforcing the law. So many to be destroyed, so few to be saved. The skylark that had soared on a fountain jet of liquid song, to gladden them when the carriage stopped by a field gate, was singing for a thousand dead comrades.

Here, by the tranquil summer sea, the once-flying hand of the poor little author had become cold and stiff for ever. There were obituary notices, praising, dissecting, belittling with trite reflection and commonplace, unfelt sentiment. It was a pity that she had not been spared to increase her output. In *Where Life flows Deep* she had struck a vein which was by no means exhausted, which would have borne more quarrying. If in her work she had not touched greatness, she was at any rate a head and shoulders above the common ruck. She had given fine promise, if not ripe performance. And Miss Maud Hopkins

was very young. There is always sadness in the death of the very young.

Out there, Lord Rotherfield had gone from the ranks of the knights. The ranks were thinning. The knights that we had known, the knights that we had ever heard of, were fewer and still fewer.

Stop Press: 'Of enteric at Kroonstad Viscount Rotherfield.'

And again Stop Press:—

'Marquis Stonehaven died of his wounds yesterday.'

Boys and old men on the side of the enemy; boys and old men on our side. He had gone with a company of his gallant Scottish corps, and had twice been in action on the far east. Then he and his clansmen had been sent west to the threatened line of communications. They had made a successful defence when the storm-cloud burst upon them, and his brave life had ebbed out while his gillies and his foresters still held the post for their dying chief. O brave lord marquis!

Carnage far and near. One radiant June day the newspapers contained the ghastly description of far-off tragedy. Three Christian missionaries had been murdered by the pirates near the Hun-ho River. Day after day the yellow-skinned fiends had dogged the footsteps of the missionaries as they walked on, praying and singing, through a valley between rocky hills. At villages men and women came out and talked and laughed with the three doomed men: gave them rice, gave them honey, gave them flowers; and then, as the three walked on, stood watching them with smiling inscrutable faces. Thus it was day by day, in village after village, till the rocky walls of the valley narrowed and closed and the missionaries saw before them the white fresh-cut wood of the three crosses glistening in the sunlight. The newspaper said that the name of the man who suffered on the middle cross was Burnett.

Had her letter reached him? There was time enough for him to have received her reply. What must she have felt now if she had not answered the far-off voice?

So many to be destroyed, so few to be saved. The words of the atrocious message seemed to be whispered in her ear by day, to be shouted in her ear by night. Carnage far and near—Nature's abominable law. It filled her brain as they rolled softly on cee-springs, with Dread riding to the right and Horror to the left of them—close to the swiftly turning wheels.

In July it was known that there was serious and widespread trouble behind the victorious armies—the veldt bursting into fire again after the marching feet had stamped out the last

sparks. Columns were being sent back in all directions. Shock and strain, strain and shock for the great house. The War Office could not say where the duke now was.

Clamouring for tidings from that innermost room in Pall Mall, Lady Colwyn had at last for answer: Pall Mall *thinks* that the duke has been given command of a flying column—a small composite force of yeomanry, irregular horse, etc. If this is so, the duke is now in the south, feeling his way along one of the fatal rivers. Even the innermost room cannot be sure of its facts nowadays. For the moment, the operations out there have lost focus; troops are busy over a vast area; news is coming through very slowly: three and four days late, and often not in the true sequence of events. What you hear of to-day may have really occurred after what you will hear of to-morrow.

Then came another telegram. The duke has almost certainly been sent south with galloping horsemen. Two days more strain—then thrice-repeated shock.

The duke is wounded—and a prisoner probably. Seriously wounded. Dangerously wounded.

Pall Mall, Stop Press, and one special correspondent have had this information three days before news comes of the disaster.

Down there, to the north of the fatal river, a column of infantry with guns and wagons has become involved in unexpected difficulty. Down there, far behind the back of our magician, an evil charm has worked. In a moment the mountain goats have turned themselves into wolves. It is our staunch battalions that are the huddled sheep, with the wolves roaring about them all through a long night, and still roaring when the sun is high again. But the horsemen had heard the barking chorus and have been galloping, galloping, hour after hour, until as they draw near it is a ride of death through the harrying wolf packs. Rent, torn, and shattered, they ride on: stagger, stumble forward, still forward, till the remnant of the force—all that is left of this unsung five hundred—reaches the friends and shakes off the foes. The wolves have lost their prey: the column has been extricated, is now safe. It is one of the finest things that have been done in the war.

Now innermost room, tell us as you hope for mercy: Has it been done by the duke's command?

All one day the news of it is dribbling homeward along the bed of the ocean, over flower-spangled fields, through the forest of blackened chimneys. The yeomanry—names of the killed are coming one by one—was the duke's squadron from his midland territory. It seems, therefore, almost certain that this

must have been the command that was given to his grace. Captain Sir Charles Lamport: killed. That is a name we know: a good midland family. Captain Jeffreys; Lieutenants Stoke, Banks, Parrott, and Sturgess of S.A. Carabineers: killed, and so on—a long list. Then Brevet-Lieut.-Col. Claude Stanford of S.A. Carabineers: killed. No list of prisoners or wounded as yet.

In the glorious July sunlight the great house sinks into a silence as of the grave. Not a whisper, not an echo, on the stone landings and stairs. As you walk along the wide corridors you can hear the ticking of the clocks in the empty reception-rooms. And night and day are as one, because sleep has left the great house.

They are sitting up night after night in the village to keep the telegraph-wire working. They never go to bed in Pall Mall, and the messages may flash along the wires at any hour. O wise, brave, dead lord marquis why have not we a telegraph-office in the house itself? Day and night our cry goes out. Give us hope. Give us hope. It is in the night that the message comes: most horrible in its vagueness, most appalling in its foreshadowing of what next we may hear.

The duke has been missing since the 15th—the day of disaster.

With burning eyes, cold trembling hands, and feet of lead, Vivien moved about the great house gasping for breath. Shafts of sunlight showed dust swimming in rainbows above the velvet carpets; through the open windows came the music of the birds—but no air. The house had become an airless tomb. Go where one would the grave-clothes wrapped one round: in the stifling grey shroud one was being buried while still alive.

'Wrong to give up hope,' said Mr. Frensham in the library. 'Must go on with my work—been cleaning the frame,' and he pointed to the picture, in front of which stood the library step-ladder.

On the hearthrug by the ladder there was a cardboard box, and something rolled in brown paper. Mr. Frensham moved the ladder; went away to his door through the books; opened it; came back and wandered aimlessly about the room.

'Go on with my work. Yes. Go on hoping too. Very hopeful nature—the duke's.'

He was haggard, and his hands, too, shook: one could see that he had been weeping. Presently from his inner room he brought a coil of frayed and blackened rope.

'Look here miss. I've been on the roof—attending to the flagstaff. Put a new rope. The servants have left off doing their work. Should do your duty—whatever you feel. The duke was always very particular about the flag.'

'When shall we hear from them again?'

'As soon as they know. You may depend on that. Very important message—astonishing fault if they held back news now.'

Lady Colwyn had told her to go out for a walk:

'Leave me please. I prefer to be alone.'

Dr. James, on guard, had told her to obey. And now Mr. Frensham told her to go out.

'You ought to be out with your dog. Very pleasant morning to give the dog a nice walk,' and she saw his hand shaking. 'Oh yes, no need to disappoint the dog. A good run—do you both good.'

Then she went out—to wait in the open air, to escape being stifled.

The dog ran on before her, barking, scampering in joy, chasing birds, leaping at butterflies, sweeping round her in his old wild circles of delight. Very slowly, with the gentle summer breeze blowing on her throbbing forehead, she walked in the sunshine where once she had walked with him. Then, when she came to the white-stemmed beeches, she sank down in the shadow and looked out into the sunlight.

The mossy bank beneath the young trees that fringed the wood was dry and soft as a bed; the air crept caressingly beneath the leaf-curtains, and far above her head made the light branches sway and rustle: here one could breathe. A dragon-fly darted to and fro; some live thing stirred in a dry ditch; and for a long time her dog hunted and dug. Then he came to her side with an earth-stained nose and bright, questioning eyes. This was not much of a walk.

The silence seemed to have spread from the house: the birds had ceased to sing; no sound came now but the rustle of the branches—no sound of life. It was as though all the world was hushed, expectant, waiting. As she sat rigid, staring out into the sunlight, the sense of this waiting hush came to her with nightmare force; and with it there came that strange impression of abnormal brightness and sharpness of outline in objects that were really a long way off. Distances seemed destroyed: great trees near the great house were toy trees, brilliantly painted toys, emerald green and blazing white; the house itself was a toy palace—if from the shadow she were to stretch forth her hand, she could rest it on the carefully cut battlements, or grasp in her

palm the small glittering flag that fluttered so gaily at the top of the miniature pole.

Thus she sat motionless for a long time, till her dog, renouncing all effort to obtain attention, curled himself for sleep on the soft moss bed. Thus she sat, staring out into the sunlight, until with a sudden cry she sprang to her knees.

What had happened to the flag?

For a moment the flag was gone. Then it rose a little way, a little more, then stopped and drooped, then fluttered out in the gentle breeze. They were flying the flag at the half-mast. The fatal news had come.

As she lay on the ground the dog licked her wet face, and whimpered and whined in a frenzy of sympathy while he listened to her sobbing voice. Thought, life itself, seemed flowing from her with her tears.

Then, as the power to think returned, grief for a time was lost in horror. He was dead. Torn and rent, bleeding and broken, he had been carried away by the enemy—a battered lamp in which the faint flame had lingered, leaping and flickering with no loving hand to tend it, till at last cold, cruel eyes in careless scrutiny had found that the light was gone. Dangerously wounded—he had been seen to fall. A prisoner—some one had seen him held by the foe. But *missing*!

Then from the torture of fact she was whirled onward to the infinite torment of fancy.

Memory and imagination built the rack, stretched her, and racked her. She could see the bare veldt now—could see the running fight, and the dusty faces of the fighting men as close to some brown rocks they rally and turn, beset by the gathered foe. Empty saddles, riderless horses; a roar of voices heard faintly above the rattle of carbine fire, rifle fire, revolver fire; horse and man, friend and foe going down together—and then the fight rolls away towards the sound of the firing guns. They have ridden on to do his bidding; and here by the rocks he is lying, among the wounded and the dead.

She sees it: wounded, maddened horses galloping back with the empty saddles, galloping over friend and foe, the dead and the living, trampling the upturned faces, breaking the broken limbs; horses with shattered thighs dragging themselves a little way, then sinking backwards, snorting like seals, bellowing like oxen in their pain; and the bleeding men who creep, like wounded dogs, towards the sheltering rocks. The night falls, and the frosty air stabs again the gaping wounds; and in delirium faint, hoarse voices moan among the rocks. Then the

day comes, and the fierce sun works on the blackened, cracking faces. And by night and day there is movement among the strewn rocks: arms lifted, trunks turning as crushed snakes turn, heads leant for a moment upon hands, then tumbling to earth again. So it is, under the hot sun, under the cold stars, during four days and nights—and then all is still.

As she sees it, she writhes and moans and tears the ground with clenching fingers; and the dog licks her neck and drags at her shoulder with frenzied paws.

Slowly the horrible vision fades; imagination loosens its grip; and memory holds her down, wringing her aching heart with regret. He is gone for ever from the sunlight to the shadows. Oh my prince, my ineffably sweet dream-prince! And she might have been his. He had called to her to go to him; the wonder of wonders had come to pass; the crown of life had been offered; and false to her own love-creed she had spurned it from her. It was as though in her dreams some mystic power had been given to draw him slowly to her, year by year, nearer and nearer, through the woven barriers of time and place, through the dusky windings of the vast dream-grotto, until the miracle was accomplished and he stood before her with outstretched arms. It was as though the fairies had worked for her, throwing their fairy-chains about his life and hers, until the fairy work was finished and they had drawn the two lives into one. Then she, who had preached the good love-creed, had been false. When her heart should have leapt from her breast in a stream of fire, it had turned to stone, and she had refused to make the mean little sacrifice of foolish pride, insane prejudice—refused to suffer extinction of self in the glory of her love for another. For a little while, if only for a little while, she might have gladdened the sightless eyes, warmed the cold dead hands, made the sunlight brighter for him till the swift night fell. Then she could have followed him among the shadows: she who had lived for him could surely have died with him.

Now nerve, muscle, blood was craving for his lost love—atom drawing atom to the union she had spurned. In this hour of death it was the birth of the real love: mind and substance fused at last; meaning after all the years, in the archaic formula—'With my body I thee worship'; the pulse of thought and the pulse of life beating with a single beat. And she writhes and moans in the unbearable agony of vain regret. Oh my prince, oh my prince—I might have been yours.

In the great house the silence is broken now by many whispers and unceasing footsteps. She has been compelled to return—

hers is not the only sorrow; but she moves as a sleep-walker who carries behind the staring eyes that guide and control movement the inward dream of horror.

The man walking with servants through the hall was the messenger—the bearer of the news. Dr. James is very white; there is a sick-nurse already; more nurses are coming; Sir William is coming. She has one glimpse of Lady Colwyn—given to her by Dr. James. She cannot hope to help Lady Colwyn now. Sir William is coming soon.

Seeing things dimly, yet comprehending nearly all that they mean, she wanders about the house, sits in her room, comes out and wanders up and down; and Time has gone from the house as well as Sleep. Sir William has been here: has talked to her. Lady Colwyn is doing very well indeed. She must be kept very quiet—the two nurses he has brought will see to that: they can be trusted. Lady Colwyn will do best quite alone for a day or so. She will not desire conversation or wish any one to read aloud to her. Sir William is very pleased with her really. He will come again very soon.

The sense of time has gone. It is evening—blood-red streams are pouring in where the rainbows danced just now, and outside the locked door of the library Mr. Frensham is speaking to her. Mr. Frensham has sent a message by a servant asking her to come to the library.

'Wanted you to be—the first foot,' and he turns the key. 'Come in, come in—come and look,' and he leads her down the room to the draped picture.

He has hung the great frame in curtains of black crape from his brown paper parcel. Draped and festooned across the top of the frame there is purple cloth; and above—as an empty crown—he has fixed the wreath of laurels from the cardboard box.

'Wanted you to see—first—before the others,' says the librarian in a shaky whisper.

Vivien had drawn back: flinching from the hand upon her arm, flinching from this new horror—this ghoulish haste to hang the funeral trappings about the lifelike form.

'He was my cousin,' and the old man burst into pitiful sobs. 'Bend-sinister — bend-sinister — great grandmother — faithful servant—at Frensham House. But they called my grandfather Henry . . . Poor boy! Poor brave boy! Cousin: but I loved him—like a son.'

Then, when he had repressed his tears, he went on talking, jerkily, huskily. Only dimly she understood—mechanically thinking. Of course. Surely she had always known this. Surely there was nothing new in what he told her now.

'He never forgot it. Never alluded to it. Stopped me once when I tried. But always treated me as an equal. Called me Henry—made me call him Harry—always. Henries both of us. Look,' and he brought out the gold and jewelled case that the dead prince had given to him, and his tears fell fast on jewels and gold. 'See—the monogram. That's what he meant. H.F. The H. for Henry—in rubies—blood colour—the colour of his blood—and the F. in white diamonds. That's what he meant.'

And dimly she understood that the old man had done well to drape the picture—the last rites performed by the faithful clansman for the head of the house.

XLVI

HOW long is it since the news came? Vivien does not know—two days, three days: an eternity? Time no longer counts, no longer can be counted. The great house has been given over to fear. It is the end of all things.

The grief of Lady Colwyn has been terrible—inexpressibly painful to see, inexpressibly painful to think of. Dr. James, coming from her ladyship's rooms, drops into one of the gilt chairs in the corridor, wipes his forehead, rests for a few moments, composes his features before he passes on towards the grand staircase. At night the nurses have failed to keep her in her bed. She walks about her room for hours—all through one night, it is said. Dr. James's perturbation increases steadily from the moment that Sir William goes to the moment that Sir William returns. Sir William, solid as a fortress, calm as a mountain landscape, has a certain effect upon her. His presence causes abatement in the restlessness. Sir William brings out Dr. James cool and composed after a long interview —not hot and tired as though he had been running—and tells Dr. James that he is pleased by what he has been observing. 'Very impressive. Oh very grand—very grand indeed. Oh yes. I am quite satisfied.'

Three days or three years? But Lady Colwyn is quiet at last—too quiet: a little old woman, shrunk and silent, in a big chair in the great bedroom, wrapped in many shawls and shivering. And still Sir William, walking up and down the library, eating a hard biscuit and returning to a table to sip some weak whisky and soda water, says it is all right.

Luncheon has been prepared downstairs and has been coldly ignored by Sir William, but he has asked for the biscuits, has asked and obtained Miss Shelton's permission to convert the room of books into a refectory, and has apologised for munching in her presence. He has heard that Miss Shelton was in the library, and has come to the library because he wants to talk to her. Not alone. He begs Mr. Frensham to remain. Words may fall which he, as the trusted librarian, should hear: certain directions may apply to him as well as to Miss Shelton.

Well then. Sir William is pleased—really pleased. All is

right. This very serious shock has been supported *grandly*. There is no other word for it. But there must be no more shock. We have drawn to the limits of safety upon our grand powers of resistance. We must not draw again.

By this Sir William means that care must be taken; common sense must be exercised. There must be press-censorship: papers with tales of victory must not be thrust into her hands to cheer her, and he looks at Mr. Frensham and seems to add, 'Now my old friend, if for *once* you wish to earn your salary, look to this.' She must not be startled by foolish friends bouncing in upon her; there must be no sharp noises; chairs or steps are not to be knocked down by housemaids; servants are not to speak to her—no old privileged Tom-fool retainer is to have access to tell her that a favourite cat is dead, or that a pigeon has flown through a pane of glass, and he looks at Dr. James, who is shaking his head negatively, and speaks with sudden petulance.

'My dear sir, these are just the things that *do* happen in great houses.'

And poor Dr. James looks very foolish.

Well then—and Sir William continues urbanely and slowly. Lady Colwyn is now to resume her ordinary habits. Things are to go on exactly as before. This is important. The break has been more than long enough. Our thin stream of life driven from its bounds by this storm must, so to speak, be brought back into the old, well-worn channel promptly—as promptly as possible.

Now the nurses have done all they can: it is the turn of the lady-in-waiting. Miss Shelton must look to it. All the old habits must be taken up.

'Yes. Yes. The old habits,' Miss Shelton echoes.

She is sitting by a window near Mr. Frensham, and there is apathy in her attitude and languor in her voice.

'Could you kindly give me your attention.'

Suddenly Sir William's massive brow has contracted in a frown, and he has spoken with raised tones. Miss Shelton has started, and she is trembling as she meets his eyes.

'Everything is to be as it was before the duke's death.'

'I will try—if—I can,' and Miss Shelton trembles violently.

Sir William looks at Dr. James, and there is displeasure in his glance. Good gracious, the duke was not *her* grandson! Dr. James opens his arms with a deprecating gesture, and Mr. Frensham turns his back and looks out of the window.

'The old hours should be kept,'—Sir William continues—'for getting up, for going to bed—for meals.'

Miss Shelton should now sit with Lady Colwyn all day and all the evening. It is for Miss Shelton to draw her back into the old settled ways—not to force her, gently to draw her: insensibly, imperceptibly, but steadily. She is to be allowed to talk, but not too much, she is to be given exercise, but not too much—promenades about the house, rather than in one room; she is to be taken out for drives, because driving was one of the old habits—but she is not to stop the carriage and talk to foolish unthinking people. More and still more directions does Miss Shelton receive.

'I will do all I can. I will try hard to—'

'You can do it, *if* you try. That is why I ask you,' says Sir William. 'You are the only person who can do it. Lady Colwyn is fond of you. There is sympathy between her and you.'

'Oh. I don't know that.'

'But *I* do.'

And Sir William continues his directions.

Should tears flow, they are to be permitted to flow. Should sad words come, sad words are to be encouraged. If Lady Colwyn exhibits inclination to discuss the most distressing aspects of her sorrow, everything is to be done to render it easy for Lady Colwyn to indulge this inclination. She is to be wooed to repetition, soothingly assisted, even prompted, to go over the ground again and again. We want words now, not silent thought. Our aim is to get the relief that comes with words when spoken to sympathetic ears.

'Well then, Miss Shelton, that is your work. I hope you will do it—I feel sure that you will do it.'

Then Sir William goes. He will not return for a week unless summoned by our friend Dr. James.

Vivien has been set to her task by a firm, strong taskmaster. 'Do your duty—whatever you feel.' That was what Mr. Frensham had said. Our lost one, our loved one has done his duty: we must do ours.

Time had returned to the house. The old routine had brought back with it the sense of the moving hours, the measure of the gliding days.

Lady Colwyn sits again in her accustomed place—sits like a statue carved in ivory; or mouths and mutters to herself; or picks up her knitting work and smoothes it for hour after hour; or is read to and drops asleep—for a moment—and wakes with a moaning cry as of a child.

'Thank you. Was that all?'

'Yes. I finished it.'

'Read it to me again—will you?'

Vivien has been reading the songs in the *Idylls of the King*.

'Miss Shelton, who taught you to read? Did I ever tell you about those persons who'—This sentence remains unfinished. 'Who taught you?'

'There was a girl at school who used to read to us, and I always tried to imitate her. We all imitated her, because we thought she read so well,' and Miss Shelton prattles with animation about the young lady who read the fairy tales at Mrs. Maitland's school. Miss Shelton is hard at her work: all day long she is wooing the spoken words. This is the second day: there have been very few words in forty-eight hours.

'Who was that? Not Lady Augusta Lidstone. I dislike—'

That sentence remains unfinished. But we must be patient. The words are beginning to come.

'Oh no. Not Lady Augusta. Do you know, it is a very extraordinary thing but I have forgotten her name. . . . She used to read us Shakespeare—sometimes. There was a very clever mistress, Miss Bauermann, and she wanted us always to be reading Shakespeare. . . . Do you like Shakespeare, Lady Colwyn? . . . Shall I read you some Shakespeare?'

There have been no more words, and Vivien is kept waiting for an answer.

'Yes, if you please. Read me Shakespeare. Not now. Later.'

In the evening, Shakespeare's plays in many volumes are waiting to be read.

'Now Lady Colwyn, which play may I read to you? May I read the *Tempest*? It is rather selfish of me to ask that, because the *Tempest* is my favourite. . . .

'What a beautiful edition this is! The *Tempest* always comes first. . . . Shall I begin with that? . . .'

'What were you saying?'

'I was asking if I may read the *Tempest*.'

'No. Read *King John*.'

Miss Shelton obeys, and after she has read a couple of scenes and observed that Lady Colwyn is listening, she begins to understand why this play has been commanded.

Lady Colwyn has gone back into the splendid past. In this dark hour that has befallen her house, she has gone back to its magnificent foundation. This play is family history. As she listens, she is thinking of the source of all their pride and pomp and splendour: she is thinking of the old heads of her house—of the Angevin kings, of princes who lived and loved and fought and bled hundreds of years ago.

And on this second night, after the reading, the words come fast. Was it Shakespeare or Miss Shelton who had wooed and won them? Faster and faster they come. Without prompting now, Lady Colwyn is speaking of her sorrow, and on either side of the fireless hearth, the unchecked tears are flowing.

Four days were gone and Sir William was coming again. He had said that he would not return for a week; but now, on this fourth afternoon, he had telegraphed to say that he was coming. Dr. James, with the long telegram in his hand, gave Vivien this unexpected news.

But why? She looked at Dr. James with sudden doubt and fear. Why had Dr. James summoned him? It had seemed that all was well—better, far better than any one but Sir William could have anticipated. Yet something wrong must have been seen by Dr. James. Some ominous signs must have presented themselves to the trained eye of Dr. James, or he would not thus prematurely have called for Sir William. In the face of Dr. James there was exactly the same expression as in the face of Miss Shelton, only a shade less strongly marked—a look of doubt and alarm.

'I don't understand it,' said Dr. James. '*I*, of course, have not asked him to come. Miss Shelton, have you?'

'*I*? No.'

'You have not? Miss Shelton, I made sure you had. Frightened you know—without cause—quite without cause, I thought you must have dashed off a telegram to him. It would have been better to do it through me, but I should have understood. You haven't done it, though?'

'No.'

'Well, it is very extraordinary. Somebody must have done it,' and Dr. James fumbled with the telegram: reading it again as he spoke. 'You know I have been sending him daily reports, and it is just possible that he has *read into* my last report something I never meant. I *may* have expressed myself badly.—But, if so, he will blame me. It is the last thing I intended to convey. He will blame me,' and Dr. James became hot from embarrassment. The great Sir William filled him with an admiration not unmixed with awe. 'But no. I can't have made such a fool of myself. Some one has written or wired to him. Who? Miss Shelton. Do you think she has done it herself?'

'No. I am sure not.'

'Who then? Mr. Frensham?'

'Oh no.'

'Look here,' and Dr. James read from the telegram. '"Com-

ing by train arriving 6.45." Miss Shelton, there is *no* train arriving 6.45. He is coming by special train. *Some one* has alarmed him, and he is coming as fast as he can.'

Then in his discomfort of mind, Dr. James read several sentences from the telegram.

'"Must change treatment soon as possible"—Miss Shelton, you will perhaps not mind telling him that I have shown no want of confidence—no fussing. I have not, have I—since he was here? "Keep P."—that is patient—"very quiet. Let no one see P. till I have seen. Important." You hear? Some one has sent him a report. One of the servants? Then he says "lightest food." No one has given her *heavy* food?'

Dr. James fumbled from embarrassment as he put the telegram back into his pocket.

'You *are* keeping her quiet, Miss Shelton, aren't you?'

'Yes.'

'He'll be here before we know where we are,' and Dr. James looked at his watch.

Sir William had arrived: was talking to Vivien at the end of the corridor, within sight of the door of her ladyship's rooms.

'Who is with her now?'

'No one.'

'Where are my nurses?'

'One is in the next room to Lady Colwyn.'

'Good. Let her stay where she is. Now Miss Shelton'—and Sir William's manner is gracious, even cordial—'I hear you have done your work very well—I thought you would. But I still want your assistance.'

And Sir William begins to issue his directions.

Miss Shelton is to go and make her evening toilet as rapidly as possible, and then return to Lady Colwyn's rooms and remain on guard there until after dinner. Sir William does not intend to see the patient till then. His visit will be less troublesome to the patient at that time, and when he has done with the patient they can put the patient to bed.

'Now I want her kept very quiet. I think we'll have no servants going in and out of the room to-night. Our good friend, Dr. James, will not mind doing sentinel outside the door. The dishes can be brought to you from the door by my nurse—and you can wait on her yourself. Don't let her talk too much. Don't let her eat too much. The less she eats to-night the better. Now, are there difficulties in all this?'

'Well. Perhaps—'

'She may make difficulties, ask questions?'

'Yes.'

'Then surmount the difficulties and answer the questions. Use your tact. Say you 've a headache and want to keep quiet yourself. Meet the difficulties as they arise.'

Then in reply to a frightened inquiry from Vivien:—

'Operation! Pooh! No. What put such nonsense into your head? Only healing art—not the surgeon's knife. Didn't my friend here tell you I was going to change the treatment? Well then,' and Sir William is suddenly very grave, 'it has become necessary to adopt strong remedies—and you may understand this. What I have to do with Lady Colwyn is not unattended with risk.'

'You think she is not really doing well—there is something dangerously wrong?'

'I think I cannot be too careful in such a case as this. I think *you* cannot be too careful in doing exactly what I have asked you.'

The difficulties had been surmounted: the silent, guarded meal was over; Lady Colwyn was established in her big chair once more.

Twenty minutes past nine, half past nine, twenty minutes to ten—and, at last, Sir William is announced. A massive and a calm man, with immense expanse of white shirt front, large pearls and heavy watch chain: 'Ah Sir William! You come to me at a late hour. But I am pleased to see you.'

The thick eyebrows are lifted—very slightly. Who is this other person in the shadow by the door: the person who is *not* in evening dress? Oh yes, Dr. James of course: our body-physician. Yes, Dr. James is excused.

Very grand is the manner of this small, ivory-white old woman, shrunk in the big chair, but still a great, great lady who asks no questions, who submits to all this watchful care of loyal subjects with their London doctors, however troublesome it may be.

'Thank you. My rheumatism has been certainly better.'

Grand too is the manner of the great palace-doctor, feeling pulse, glancing at eyes, making his polite inquiries: employing his splendidly transparent palace-fictions. That restlessness of nights was produced by rheumatism. Sir William has paid his visits to cure the rheumatism.

'Yes Lady Colwyn, everything seems on the mend'—the thick eyebrows give Sir William permission to be seated. 'Yes,' and he glances at Miss Shelton—'All the world seems on the mend.'

'Ah.'

Dr. James humbly retires, and softly closes the door behind him.

'Better news from out there, Lady Colwyn—or so they tell me. The situation more hopeful generally. There seems a wide feeling of hope. People are beginning to hope—'

'Are they? . . . ah!'

Sir William, comfortably settling himself into his chair, allows the conversation to flag. After a long pause he turns to Miss Shelton.

'I met a man from the War Office this afternoon—What is the name of those flowers? Not azaleas, Miss Shelton? Surely too late in the year for azaleas. They can't hope for many bright days now, can they?'

The flowers are not azaleas: they are hot-house flowers: Miss Shelton does not know their name.

'I don't think you know much about flowers, Miss Shelton,' and he smiles—'or what they can reasonably hope for.'

Then, after another pause, he speaks to Lady Colwyn:

'Oh yes. The War Office. My friend was distinctly hopeful.'

Softly Dr. James returns to the room with a newspaper; and Sir William, making himself very much at home, asks permission to glance at it; reads it in silence; seems to have forgotten where he is.

'Ah. There is an echo of what my friend let fall—here, in this paper. It seems there has been over-statement in recent lists—of casualties—and so forth. I had the same thing in a letter.'

Lady Colwyn looks at him intently; then looks at the flowers, and begins to mouth.

After some minutes Dr. James comes back with a letter, and Sir William reads it without obtaining permission.

'Ah, here again. In this letter—Miss Shelton! Be *careful*! Reason to hope'—and he loses his place in the letter. 'Reason to hope that the lists of killed are wrong. Good reason to hope—Many mourners will shed tears of joy to find their loved ones safe.'

'What is it? You are acting a play—what is it?'

Sir William has come to Lady Colwyn's chair.

'I mean what I said just now, Lady Colwyn. Good reason to hope—to shed tears of joy.'

'You—you—you. My boy—my boy!'

As she rises he puts his arm about her.

'Yes. Your boy among the others. Why not? The best reason for hoping that the duke may be safe—*is* safe.'

XLVII

THE duke was coming home. Growling voices of men, squealing voices of women, behind the baize doors, and none to censure: mice that scamper and frolic behind the wainscot and no cat to frighten them into silence; a maid and a man dancing a minuet on a stone floor while half the menial herd laughs and claps its hands—let them dance, let them shout. Their duke is coming home.

Count the weeks, count the days—my duke is coming home. Now drive me over the hills and far away, drive me fast and drive me long, drive me higher and higher, along the ridge where the sea-wind blows and the sea-birds call, drive me here, drive me there—but don't drive me out of my mind by chattering of Sir William's advice not to overdo it. My boy is coming home.

He will be here by the fifteenth of September, by the thirtieth, by the first week of October—at the *very* latest. And he will not go back again. No one can want a duke who is not a soldier by profession out there now. The second colony has been annexed. The real war is done. Nothing remains but clearing up, tidying, making straight. The work may be short, may be long. But no matter how long it takes, sooner or later the remnant of our stubborn foe must yield—dry-eyed still beneath the raining blows, must cry to Destiny, if not to us: 'Pax. Give me pax.'

He has been recovering of his wounds at Cape Town. Hit in three places—but the fairies have made him whole. Three fairies seized and dragged with their fairy hands the three hot spears made by the flying bullets, and saved their fairy prince. And now that we know all, we know that the glory of the ride of death was his. To him and to that dark knight, his dead lieutenant, is the glory. It was the duke's command. When these two fell the deed had been done, the riders were close to their goal, freedom for the voiceless guns and the huddled men had been fought for and gained. Honour has been given to him: here and there, the world has acclaimed him. He is a duke *now*—whatever he was when he sailed away last year. The

fairies can find his title now in men's hearts, as well as in the pages of the red-bound books.

We know now that in morbid vision we have bitterly wronged those brave bearded men. When they carried him away, they were gentle as women to their stricken enemy. He lay in no rocky place, but in a farmhouse bed; and the eyes that watched the lamp were as skilled as they were kind. When our marching men came after many days to the house among the hills, they found, pinned above the sick man's bed, a letter from the queer, badly-dressed general. This trousered general-by-courtesy explained that he had moved on only a few hours ago; he had been wanting to send a message to say that the young man was all right, would have been glad to send the young man himself, but, as they knew, had been kept very busy during the last fortnight. That was their fault, not his. He hoped to see them all again before long, but he could not stop now.

He had told her to stay here till he came back: had made her promise to stay with granny till then. But now in five days she would be free. When the good ship touched the quay she might go. He had not meant that she need stay to see him—he had not said so. He was safe and well—it could not be necessary to wait, to look at him with her own eyes, to make quite sure. That was the privilege of relations, not of chance acquaintance. It would be better to go while the hawsers strained and the floating walls crept to their berth. Then should begin her long-delayed visit to Mrs. Gardiner.

'Take up your pen,' said Lady Colwyn sternly, when she had been told of Vivien's letter to kind Mrs. Gardiner.

'Now. Are you ready? Say this—in your own words—Your previous letter was written under a misapprehension. You are obliged to her for saying that she will receive you, but you are not leaving Hawkridge at present. Lady Colwyn cannot spare you just now, but you will hope for the suggested pleasure at some future date.'

Lady Colwyn, sitting very upright in her chair, had regained all of her old powers: Lady Colwyn must be obeyed.

'No, my dear,' said Lady Colwyn later. 'I could not spare you. It is not probable that Morecambe will pay me a long visit—he will have so much—so very much to do. Two or three days is all I should hope for. And then—without you—I should feel lonely—very lonely indeed.'

And again, on another occasion, she indirectly referred to this subject.

'Miss Shelton. I trust that you have not thought me unkind to you—or forgetful of your kindness to me—since our good news came. I like your company. If I have seemed neglectful—'

'Oh no, Lady Colwyn.'

'If I have. It is only because I have been absorbed—by my happy thoughts.'

Now, on the third of October—this last of the five interminable days—Lady Colwyn was very restless. Her happy thoughts had failed to make the clock hands move: the wheels of her carriage turning fast had seemed to stand still: two long drives had taken only fragments from the fulness of the hours.

In the evening she began to walk about the room. She could not listen when any one read to her; she could not understand when she read to herself. At last she sat down.

'Miss Shelton.'

'Yes.'

'Where are those papers?'

'They are all on the table. Which one would you like?'

'No, no. Your own papers. Those papers you spoke of—family history. Bring them. I would like to see them at once.'

'Yes—but it is rather late.'

'Do as I ask you. I cannot sleep. They may interest me. They will interest me very much.'

Lady Colwyn must be obeyed. Vivien obeyed her, and soon had brought her heavy packet and was breaking seals and cutting twine and tape.

'Push the table nearer. Move the lamp. Clear the table—throw the things on the floor—be quick. . . . And now,' added Lady Colwyn. 'Look at the papers as you hand them to me. There may be documents of quite a private nature.'

The thought had come to Vivien that there might be things which only a daughter's eye should see—long-faded photographs, silken hair in folded tissue—and she was glad that the great lady had also thought of this.

But there was nothing at all. It was a parcel of such rubbish as is first put in strong boxes because some one lacks the courage to burn it, and in strong boxes ever after it remains—a legacy from the lazy-brained to the foolishly-sentimental. Here was a surrender of a lease; an extract from a stranger's will that ought to be with some scheduled title-deeds—or ought not to be there, probably, because it had never been really wanted; two fire insurance policies relating to houses that had crumbled into dust; the copy of a steward's copy of somebody's

admission to the roll of a manor that had long since vanished off the map; and so on.

Then there were playbills, cuttings from newspapers, invitation cards, the first act of a blank verse tragedy in a lady's best Italian hand, etc.,—rubbish and more rubbish with which to cover the table.

And at last came family history—scraps of it, leaves of it, pamphlets of it—printed and in MS.: the preposterous, futile stuff which pious aunts accumulate: the meagre treasure of a century's search. Here, as Vivien meekly handed them over, were extracts from volumes about the landed gentry; that carefully copied page in which we have put our best foot forward and tried to ruffle and swagger with the boldest; a letter from the editor offering thanks for the valuable contribution; unknown names of dead foolish people: Turnours, Carters, Fieldings, etc. Vivien was ashamed of the foolish stuff as dutifully she laid it before the great lady.

But it amused Lady Colwyn. It was surprising to see how family history was calming her nerves, soothing her excited brain. She read it greedily and steadily, in her old masterful way, with the lamp close to her thin, proud nose. After a little while Vivien retired to her chair, her book, and her thoughts.

'Thank you,' said Lady Colwyn presently, as she put down something and picked up something else. 'Thank you. It is very interesting.'

It was growing late, but still Lady Colwyn read hungrily.

'Lady Colwyn—*don't* you think—?'

'No. Be silent please. I am deeply interested.'

She was busy with a peculiarly noxious piece. It was in the form of a pamphlet, that apparently had proved too rich and too long for publication. There was an endorsement which stated with quiet indignation that it had been refused by more than one editor in the year sixty-four. In this careful work of ample detail we were plainly putting our best foot forward and covering all the ground with it. This *was* the family, on the mother's side, of our young friend. These and none others are the dead men that stand behind her. Now we shall see. Now we shall see. They were wonderfully good names—some of them.

Suddenly with her open hand Lady Colwyn gave the table a bang that would have been not unworthy of Mrs. Wardrop in her lighter moods.

'Oh what is it Lady Colwyn?'

'Nothing—at present. Sit still.'

It was only a name that had made Lady Colwyn bang the table. Vivien, not reading, but with eyes upon her book, did

not see the expression in the proud old face as presently Lady Colwyn looked at her over the top of the rejected paper.

It was there then—Lady Colwyn's lips shook as she thought of it—the golden current, the divine fire, the flash that can only come out of the dim past from the hearts of dead men. Her theories were splendidly upheld. She had been conscious of it herself very soon: had known really that she could not be mistaken. The great Scottish lord had seen it at once—in ten minutes. *Something* must be there. But who, who could have guessed that there was *this* behind the flash?

And again Lady Colwyn read about the name. 'Married 1785 the Honourable and Reverend Henry George Augustus ST. KEVERNE, sometime rector of Little Frensham; honorary canon of Gloucester; Author of *An Ancient House*, *Annals of the St. Kevernes*, etc. etc.' Books that we can find in our own library! A personage, this dead man, whose life can be traced: not a myth, but one of *us*, who certainly lived, whose blood—*our* blood—now flows in the veins of this our lady-in-waiting and our cousin.

'I would like,' said Lady Colwyn, 'to retain one of these documents, if you will allow me. I will tell you why. But not now. It is late, dear, it is late. . . . Yes, ring,' and Lady Colwyn crossed the room, and an incredible thing occurred.

She kissed her lady-in-waiting.

'Good-night. That—that was a kiss of welcome. . . . Because —because you are not going to Mrs. Gardiner's—because you consented to stay with me.'

She was going to see him. He had asked to see her in the library. He had come late last night. He had been very tired after his journey: he was not really strong yet. Granny had seen him last night.

On this October morning the blackbirds and the thrushes had begun to sing again and the sun was blazing from a June sky. She stood outside the library door, waiting for a few moments, and the music of the birds throbbed in her ears.

The room was full of sunlight; the birds were singing; he had risen from a sofa and was standing beneath his picture; he was calling her Vivien.

'Vivien, I have so many things to tell you. I am so glad to see you. I have so many things to tell you.'

The sunlight dazzled her; the song of the birds confused her; he was calling her Vivien.

'May I tell you the truth, Vivien? I want to tell you the

truth—however ugly it sounds. But I don't know where to begin.'

He was dressed in grey; he was bronzed by the sea voyage, but he was very thin; the streaming sunbeams showed her the place upon his forehead where death had grazed him; he was smiling; he was holding her trembling hand in his.

Then he talked to her and she listened, scarcely understanding, scarcely wanting to understand. The offended birds had ceased to sing; the outraged sun had pulled a cloud before its angry face. His voice was music and his smile could make the sunlight.

He was telling her what he had thought that day when she hurt her mouth; and the faint scar throbbed as his eyes sought and found it. He was telling her what he thought when she hid herself from all her friends. He was telling her about the war. He was telling her about that dread knight, Claude Stanford.

'Vivien, I must tell you the truth however ugly it sounds. . . .

'We were always coming together—he and I. And this is what I thought. I thought, The dog will shoot me. As soon as we are engaged—at the first chance, this dog will shoot me. Wasn't that a caddish thought? He did not do it. He was doing better things than that.

'So on we went—side by side. It seemed that I couldn't get away from his snarling teeth and his scowling eyes. But you see, Vivien, the devil is never as black as he is painted. Down I went—like an ass—with fever. Not enteric. Something beastly that they keep out there—for the visitors. And *he* stayed back—to nurse me.

'It was gall and wormwood. He was giving me my life, not taking it away. I was too bad—to refuse the favour. I was pretty bad. They thought it was all up with me. *He* thought so; and then one night he withdrew his lies.

'"Morecambe," he whispered—there were people in other beds—"how much did you care about that girl from the shop?" Then I told him how much.'

His voice was music—his smile was a white sword made of sunbeams that pierced one's breast.

'"Suppose," he whispered, "she had been as virtuous as pretty. What would you have done?" Then I told him . . . that I would have crawled to your feet—asked you to put your foot upon my neck—asked you to put your foot upon my heart and trample it into the dust—but asked you *to forgive me.*

'"Well," he said, "she was. I lied about it. But listen, Morecambe—not a braggart's lie—out of sheer policy. I felt

certain it was only a question of time. She was afraid of me. She must give way. I didn't want *you* chipping in."

'That cured me. I went to sleep and dreamt about you. It was what you called the respite from pain. Vivien, if you had been my own sister I could not have been happier than I was to know that you were pure.

'Well, after the fall of Pretoria we went on, and there he was again—and Vivien—it is a horrible thing to confess, but I thought again: The dog will shoot me *now*. He won't let me go home.

'But he did not do it. He had better things to do. Vivien, he was doing splendidly well. When they said they would give me a chance and I heard that we were to be side by side again—I *knew* that it was an honour to have him with me. . . . You know what happened. It was just at the end. . . . "Morecambe, we are not going to be stopped?" . . . He did not mean us to be stopped. Nothing could stop him—he went on; and, foremost fighting, fell. . . . I did my best. I did all I could.

'Now I have told you the truth—all the truth, all my thought of you. Now can you forgive me?'

'Yes.'

'Did you ever love this man?'

'No.'

'Vivien,' and he stood before her with outstretched arms. 'Vivien! Are you going to prove your forgiveness? Are you going to be my wife?'

'Your wife?'

His arms were about her, but she slid through his arms till she knelt upon the ground. And like a goose-girl—like a very foolish goose-girl—she began to cry.

'Oh my prince. Lift me up, or leave me here. Do with me what you like. Oh my prince . . .'

But the prince lifted up his goose-girl—he *must* have read the pretty, foolish tales!

'Unworthy? Hush. My sweet, my silly Vivien. You are good, you are brave, you are beautiful. What more should a man want in his wife?'

So he placed her by his side, in the sunlight, . . . in the sunlight, on his throne.

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